UCA Core Self-Study 2014-2024

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I. Introduction

The UCA Core is a comprehensive academic program of study designed to develop and reinforce students' knowledge and skills of critical inquiry and effective communication, as well as the knowledge and skills necessary for living responsible, ethical lives in a diverse and changing world. The overarching goal of the program is to facilitate the development of thoughtful, knowledgeable, articulate, and ethical citizens.

The UCA Core is UCA's approach to providing a comprehensive, liberal education to all undergraduate students. It is designed to: 1) Help students develop the knowledge and skills recognized as fundamental to a broad liberal education and necessary for success in a diverse and ever-changing world. 2) Develop and build knowledge and skill areas across the curriculum from introductory, lower-division courses to junior and senior level, upper-division course work. 3) Apply what the student has learned in a culminating, capstone experience. 4) Complement the knowledge and skills particular to any field of study or career path.

The UCA Core is a cohesive course of study carried through the student's entire undergraduate career that builds core competencies around four knowledge and skill areas: *Critical Inquiry* – The ability to analyze new problems and situations to formulate informed opinions and conclusions. *Effective Communication* – The ability to develop and present ideas logically and effectively in order to enhance communication and collaboration with diverse individuals and groups. *Responsible Living* – The ability to address real-world problems and find ethical solutions for individuals and society. *Diversity* – The ability to analyze familiar cultural assumptions in the context of the world's diverse values, traditions, and belief systems as well as to analyze the major ideas, techniques, and processes that inform creative works within different cultural and historical contexts.

A Brief History of the UCA Core

In May 2012 a General Education Taskforce was formed by interim Provost Steven Runge. The purpose of the taskforce was to provide one or two (maximum) recommendations for redesigning the general education program at UCA. UCA's program had not significantly changed in over 20 years and was 47 credit hours – the largest in the state. Following the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) visit in 2000, general education and assessment of general education was highlighted as an area that needed improvement. The 2010 HLC report concluded **"***UCA's assessment efforts were uneven and in need of immediate improvement" and "while UCA reviews general education it appears unable to*

think broadly about the skills and attitudes this critical program implies for the students". This problem was due in large part to the history and design of the program. In addition to these concerns, the legislative constraints from Act 747,[1] adopted in 2011, created a burden for many professional licensure programs who must meet the mandates of their professional boards within the framework of the 120 credit hours mandated by the state through Act 747. For example, with the previous General Education model, UCA nursing majors (comprising 6% of the freshman class at the time of study) must complete 131 hours—putting them 11 hours beyond the 120 hours required in Act 747. Given these variables, it was evident that the current model of general education at UCA could no longer continue. The revisions to the UCA Core were designed with the intention of both making UCA's general education program coherently structured around well-articulated and assessable learning outcomes, and being minimally cumbersome on extant programs and consistent with state law.[2]

When UCA established a General Education Task Force, and the provost charged its members (faculty members from each college) with re-evaluating the university's general education program, these revisions were grounded explicitly on the university's mission of academic vitality, integrity, and diversity. The task force considered two fundamental questions as part of their work: 1) What are the skills, competency areas, and attitudes that UCA seeks to develop in every graduate of the university? 2) How can we effectively and sustainably assess those skills, competency areas, and attitudes? The Task Force began by considering UCA's mission statement:

> The University of Central Arkansas, a leader in 21st-century higher education, is committed to excellence through the delivery of outstanding undergraduate and graduate education that remains current and responsive to the diverse needs of those it serves. The university's faculty and staff promote the intellectual, professional, social, and personal development of its students through innovations in learning, scholarship, and creative endeavors. Students, faculty, and staff partner to create strong engagement with the local, national, and global communities. The University of Central Arkansas dedicates itself to academic vitality, integrity, and diversity.[3]

The UCA Core continues to promote this mission through supporting the core values of intellectual excellence, community, diversity, and integrity by offering quality academic offerings to all UCA students

[1] https://adhe.edu/File/Act747.pdf
[2] From "Redesigning General Education at the University of General Arkansas," available upon request.
[3] https://uca.edu/about/mission/

at both the lower and upper levels, and regularly assessing our general educational curriculum to assure that all our general education programming meets student need and promotes academic excellence and student success.

The Taskforce presented recommendations for revising general education at UCA in September 2012. Public, open sessions were held during the fall of 2012. The final proposal/recommendation was approved on January 9, 2013 by a vote of 18 in favor, 1 opposed, and 2 abstentions.[4] UCA then began a transition period during which the general education council would become the UCA Core Council, a more representative body, curricula would be revised and updated to meet the new UCA Core guidelines, a Director would be named, and an assessment plan developed and implemented. The transition period lasted throughout the 2013-14 academic year, with the UCA Core being fully implemented beginning fall 2014.

Structure of the UCA Core

The UCA Core requires 38 credit hours at the lower-division (LD Core). These courses include the 35-credit-hour required state minimum core and one additional three-credit-hour course to satisfy the responsible living element in the UCA Core mission. The remaining 35 hours from the state minimum are distributed in the other skills areas of critical inquiry, effective communication, and diversity. Embedded within the lower-division is a first-year seminar (FYS). The purpose of the first-year seminar is to provide a small-class learning environment to facilitate engagement in academic study at the collegiate level and make a connection to the university thus facilitating future success. At the upper-division (UD Core), additional courses within the four skills areas - Critical Inquiry (I), Effective Communication (C), Diversity (D), and Responsible Living (R) - promote the development and application of knowledge and skills emphasized at the lower-division. In addition, a Capstone Experience (Z) provides a culminating, educational experience.

The Lower-Division (LD) Core at UCA is intended to provide a foundational education in the four core competencies: Effective Communication, Critical Inquiry, Diversity, and Responsible Living. Lower-division Core courses are defined by their role in knowledge and skill acquisition. To be foundational experiences, these courses must introduce and develop key concepts and skills in the four competency areas. A course in the lower-division Core, as foundational, is the primary course in which a Core competency is introduced. The focus of the course is primarily the development of a Core competency,

[4] https://uca.edu/facultysenate/files/2012/08/MINUTES-1-9-2013.pdf

irrespective of course content. In order to provide a foundational experience, these courses must be essentially designed around this competency and with an eye on the specific goal under which they are designated, and the learning outcomes affiliated with that goal.[5]

First Year Seminars are defined by their placement in the LD Core. FYS courses are to be introductions to the university experience providing a seminar style, intensive educational experience as well as opportunities to connect to UCA. First-Year Seminar courses provide a highly interactive, small-class learning environment for first-year students. In addition, these courses offer support for the unique needs of first-year students.

The Upper-Division (UD) Core at UCA reinforces and applies those skills introduced and developed at the lower division. Upper-Division Core courses are an opportunity to apply the skills introduced and developed at the lower-division and demonstrate mastery. The UCA Core is not connected to any individual major or minor program, and if programs wish to offer a full complement of UD Core courses for their majors or minors they are welcome, so long as they respect the integrity of the UCA Core program, and so long as those courses exemplify the UCA Core's values. However, should a program decide, or otherwise be unable, to provide a full complement of UD Core courses within a major program, it is the responsibility of that program to develop an academic map or program of study that integrates UD Core courses from outside of that program in a pedagogically sound and efficient way to afford students an efficient path to graduation.

The UD Core culminates in a Capstone Experience (Z) that integrates effective communication and critical inquiry alongside one's chosen field of study. Capstones are defined by their placement in the UCA Core. Capstones are designed to be a culminating experience in the major, affording the student an opportunity to demonstrate her abilities in effective communication and critical inquiry, alongside her disciplinary knowledge. Capstones are opportunities for students to engage in an integrative educational experience drawing from their comprehensive education.

The goal of the UCA Core is to provide a common, foundational educational experience to all UCA undergraduate students. The UCA Core achieves this by providing a coherent educational program

[5] Each competency is further broken down into Goals. Critical Inquiry includes three goals (A - Inquiry and Analysis; B – Scientific; C – Quantitative); Effective Communication includes three goals (A – Oral, B – Written, C – Collaboration); Diversity includes three goals (A – Own, B – Other, C – Creative Works), and Responsible Living includes two goals (A – Ethics and B – Well-Being). In order to be included in the UCA Core a course needs to address one goal under a competency. A full list, including rubrics, can be located at: https://uca.edu/core/assessment/.

oriented around four Core competencies scaffolded throughout the student's undergraduate career at UCA.

II. Assessment

A significant component of the UCA Core is the redesign of UCA's general education curriculum around articulated and assessable learning outcomes, categorized by competency and grouped by goal. Assessment of the UCA Core proceeds on a 4 year cycle. Each year a single competency is assessed. The first four-year cycle provided initial data. The second four-cycle allowed for an assessment of the process as a whole. A full programmatic assessment is completed every 10 years. Presented below is a brief synopsis of the assessment process and associated rationale as well as compressed and collated results from the previous eight years of assessment.

Methods and Measures

There are no standardized artifacts for UCA Core assessment purposes. Faculty are free to design and develop assignments for assessment purposes. This freedom allows faculty to design assignments befitting their course content, and avoids the appearance of dictating content to faculty, thus respecting what otherwise might be interpreted as an infringement on academic autonomy. However, they are provided opportunities to learn about UCA Core assessment to assure that the assignment they design aligns to the learning outcomes of the UCA Core, and will provide meaningful data in relation to student learning across core outcomes. This latitude, however, has led to recurrent issues with the data, as is noted below.

In terms of process, all faculty scheduled for UCA Core assessment are surveyed via Google Form. The form asks faculty to indicate the assignment(s)/artifact(s) used for assessment purposes, its place within the course curriculum, as well as the relevant context of the artifact(s). Faculty development sessions are offered the semester before collection to assist them in both understanding the process itself as well as how to best design a student artifact to align to the Core rubric under which their courses assess. The Office of Assessment collects all student artifacts and uploads them into AQUA, as Watermark software solution designed for student learning outcomes assessment.

The Office of Assessment subsequently recruits a scoring team for each outcome from those instructors who teach UCA Core classes within that respective competency and who submitted artifacts for

assessment. The scoring teams are assembled in the summer following the academic year during which artifacts were collected. The scoring team meets for three days. During the first day, and sporadically throughout the sessions, the team is normed on the goal on which it is focused. The team then proceeds to score student artifacts from the stratified, random sample assembled by the Office of Assessment within AQUA.

Data Collection and Review

Data collected via the scoring teams is input into AQUA. The data is accessible by the Office of Assessment who provides a summary brief to the UCA Core Council every fall. The Assistant Provost for Academic Assessment and General Education reviews the data and provides an interpretation to relevant stakeholders as well as publishing an annual report. In addition, results are shared in campus forums and via the UCA Core website. In addition, Colleges and Departments are able to request tailored reports, as it relates to areas within their purview.

Before reviewing the data below, it is important to recognize limitations endemic to assessment of learning in a higher education environment. When considering the analysis of assessment data in higher education one must attend to the simple facts that learning is not an easily quantifiable attribute, that data collected is not amenable to standard statistical analysis since the variables measured are not interval or ratio variables, but ordinal, and that the educational environment is not amenable to conditions necessary for model integrity or statistical rigor. With respect to quantifying student learning, a standard rubric that measures outcomes across competency levels cannot be analyzed as if the interval between a one and two is identical to that between a two and three or three and four. Rather, the numbers, instead of indicating equidistant levels of learning, are indicative of rank. That is, a four is higher than a three, which is higher than a two, but we are not sure, nor can we quantify, how much they differ, nor do they differ by the same amount. Therefore, our data analysis has evolved to focus on frequency data as opposed to means and standard deviations. Regardless, all assessment data should be taken with the proverbial grain of salt. In addition, assessment in higher education can fail to meet minimal standards of statistical rigor since one cannot control for all reasonable factors that predict an outcome, nor can one, for ethical reasons, withhold interventions necessary to isolate factors and predict an effect. Assessment in higher education is thus rife with insuperable difficulties inherent to the practice that necessitate that interpretations account for the problematic nature of attempting to measure student learning in an environment that forecloses the possibility of statistical rigor.

The Office of Assessment analyzes the data collected in AQUA, focusing primarily on frequency data and student learning across level (class year) looking for marked improvement across time for each learning outcome assessed. Results are shared with the UCA Core Council and findings disseminated to the faculty at large.

Results[6]

Responsible Living

The UCA Core is assessed on a four-year cycle. Each year one competency area is addressed. The responsible living competency was assessed during AYs 16-17 and 20-21. Below are some key takeaways from the AY 20-21 report.

- Faculty participation continues to be an issue. **AY 20-21 survey response rate = 45.69%** Most notably, the **Fall 2020 response rate was 26.67%**
- Poorly chosen or designed assignments were again recognized as a problem.
- A noticeable **decline in scores** was demonstrated between the lower and upper divisions of Goal A (Ethics), which is the opposite of what would be expected or desired.
- For Goal A, significantly **less than 50%** of students at the upper division scored **"accomplished" or higher**, with **less than 20%** of students scoring **"exemplary"**.
- There was **no growth** indicated in student learning in Goal A from AY 16-17, where Goal B showed **significant growth** from AY 16-17. This may be indicative that **scaffolding of the Core needs to be revisited**.
- The **rubrics ought to be revisited** in order to clarify language.

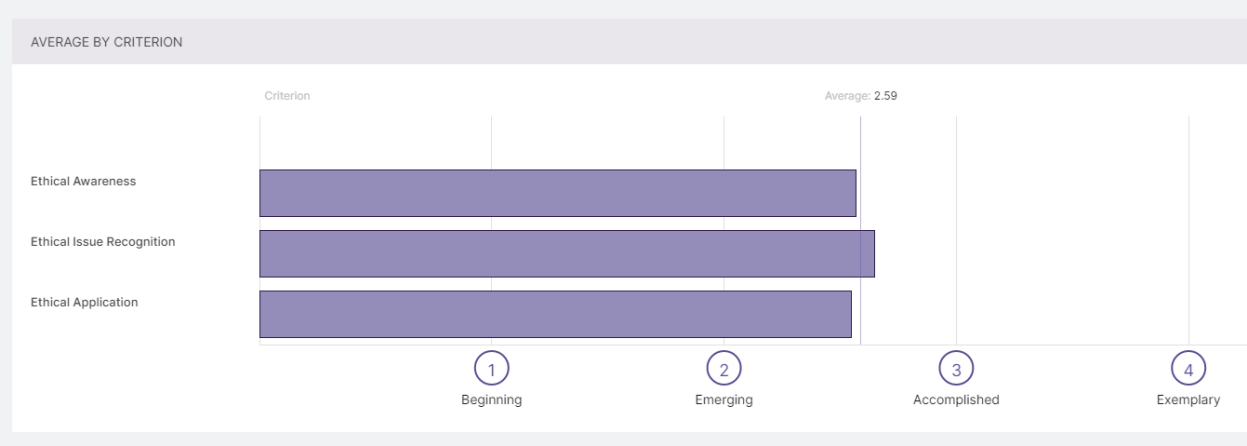
Since AY 20-21 was the beginning of the second 4-year assessment cycle for the UCA Core, it afforded an opportunity to compare student learning from the first assessment cycle of responsible living with the second cycle. Below are frequency data for upper division courses for each outcome under each goal of responsible living for AY 2016-2017. These provide points of comparison with the most recent assessment cycle. Upper division scores are the primary focus of the below data since they will indicate ultimate success and skill level among students and thus indicate level of mastery of the student body.

[6] All previous assessment reports are available at: https://uca.edu/core/assessment/

Goal A (Ethics)

Overall Score Distribution by Level (AY 20-21)

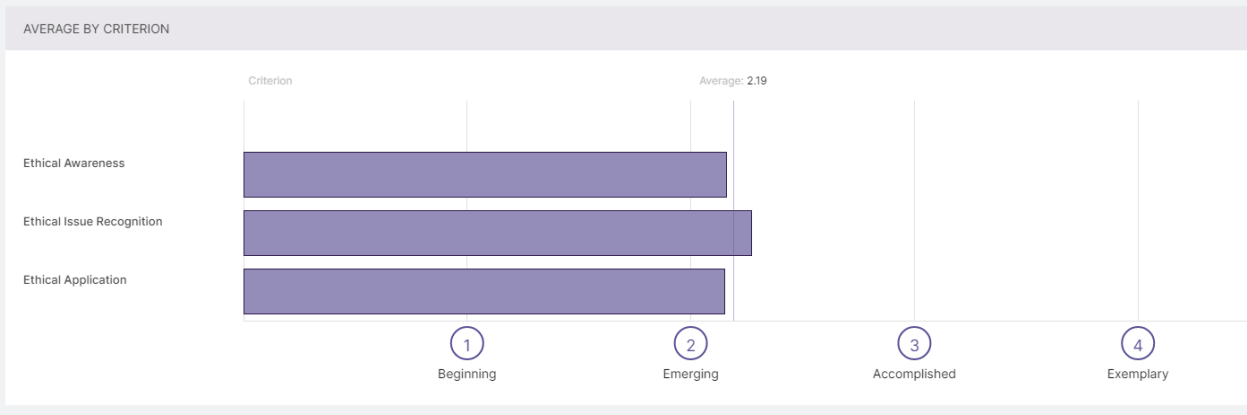
Lower Division Average (by outcome)



The averages for each learning outcome were:

- Ethical Awareness = 2.57
- Ethical Issue Recognition = 2.65
- Ethical Application = 2.55

Upper Division Average (by outcome)



The averages for each outcome were:

- Ethical Awareness = 2.16
- Ethical Issue Recognition = 2.27
- Ethical Application = 2.15

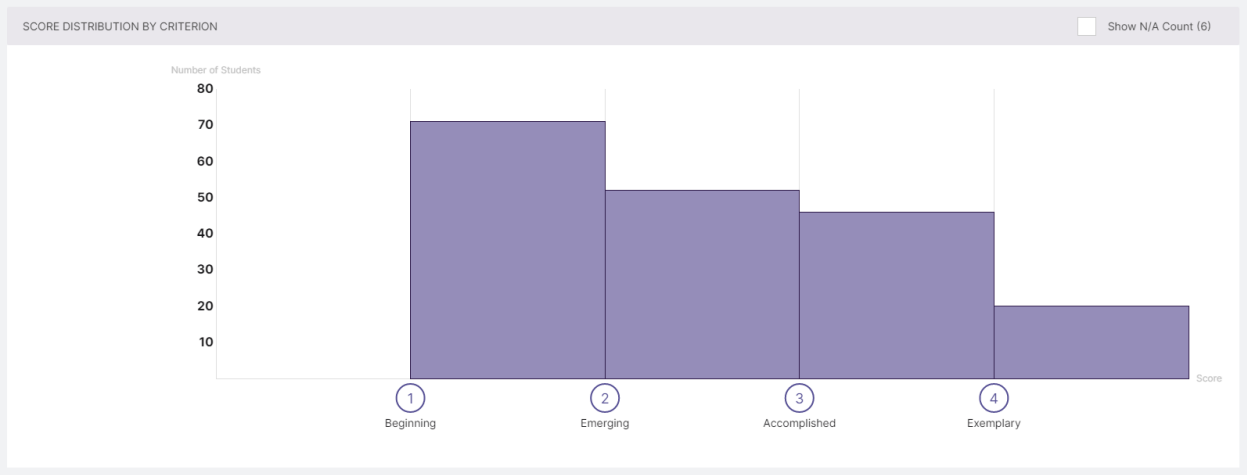
The most notable pattern from the data is the decrease in average score for each outcome from the lower division to the upper division. This is the opposite of what would be expected.

Of course, it would be bizarre, to say the least, if students become worse at ethical reasoning the longer they remained at UCA. A more cogent interpretation of the data may suggest two different yet equally probable explanations. First, although the UCA core curriculum is designed to be scaffolded, and assessed as if it were, it is not *de facto* scaffolded insofar as a student may take a lower level course under rubric A and an upper level course under rubric B, or vice versa. Thus, student course work in the responsible living competency is not necessarily aligned at the lower and upper division by goal across time. Given that the vast majority of lower level courses in responsible living are designated under rubric B (well-being) and here we see a decrease at the upper level under rubric A, it is plausible that this could be accounted for by the fact the students taking upper level responsible living courses under rubric A never took a lower level responsible living course under the same rubric. Thus, they are not as prepared as we'd hope to excel under rubric A at the upper level. A second hypothesis supported by scorer comments, is that the assignments given students were not designed well to showcase a student's ability either because the assignment didn't address the outcomes, the student was not prompted to perform along the outcomes, or an admixture of factors indicative of poor assignment selection or design. Regardless, this is a troubling finding and indicates that we are not providing our students the education we assure them they are receiving regarding this competency area and this goal (ethics) specifically. If we value ethical education, and recognize the paramount role it plays in students' development and education, then we need to address this situation.

Detailed by Outcome (AY 20-21)

SLO 1: Ethical Awareness

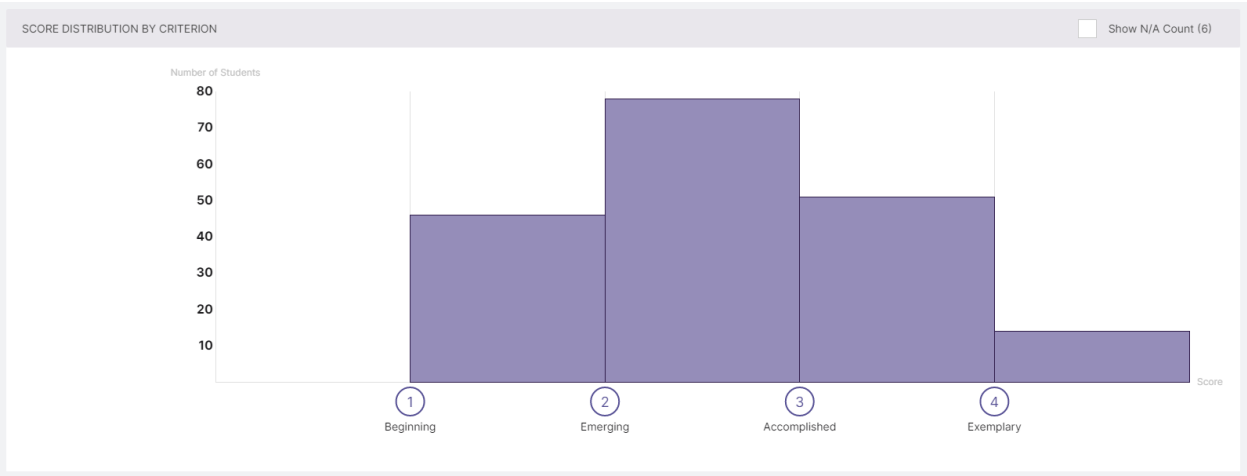
Upper Division



At the upper division, we see minimal success. Only 34.92% of students at the upper level score "Accomplished" or higher (a 3 or 4 on the rubric) with a paltry 10.58% achieving a score of 4 or "Exemplary." It is worrisome that only one in ten of our students studying and being assessed for "Ethics" can score as exemplary in this area. Unfortunately, this pattern repeats for all the outcomes under rubric A.

SLO 2: Ethical Issue Recognition

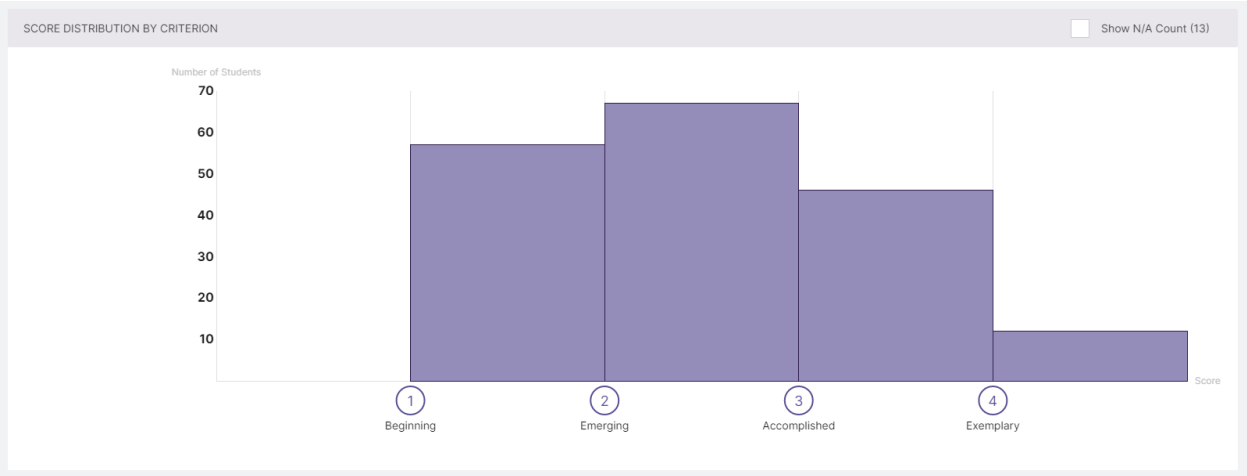
Upper Division



As with the previous outcome, we see a problematic pattern at the upper level. For this outcome, although 34.34% of students scored “Accomplished” or higher, merely 7.41% scored at the “Exemplary” level.

SLO 3: Ethical Application

Upper Division



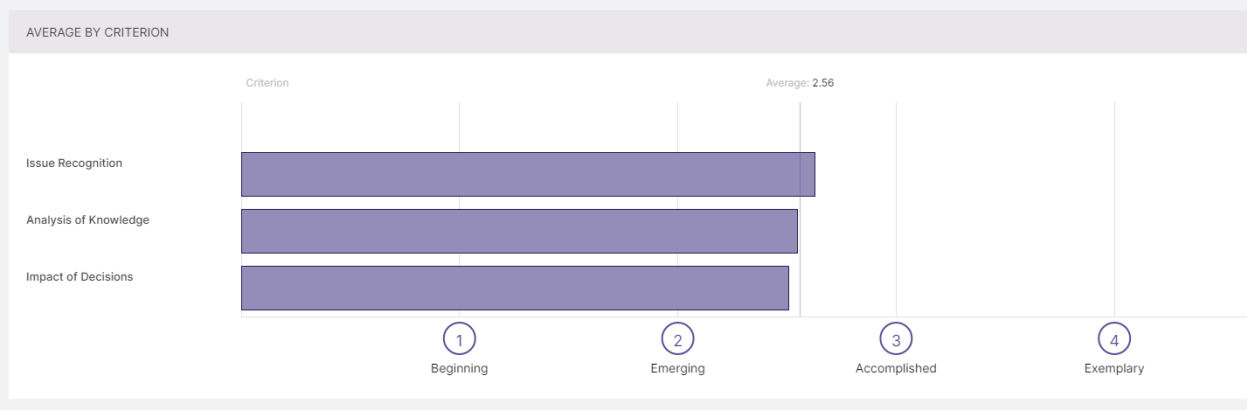
At the upper level, only 31.87% of students score “Accomplished” or higher with only 6.59% scoring at the “Exemplary” level. The numbers are clear. If we presume them to be representative of student skill level, of which there is reason to be dubious, then our students are not being educated adequately in this outcome or across this goal as a whole.

As noted above, this pattern may be attributable to the fact that we don’t have a scaffolded and aligned core curriculum between the lower and upper levels, so students taking upper division ethics courses may have never had an ethics course before. In addition, there are assignment selection and design problems as well as the fact that some faculty may not know that they are teaching a responsible living course in the core. But we do not see this pattern with Goal B, nor have we ever seen this pattern before. This may be because other competencies have disciplinary requirements forcing alignment, as happens, for example, in the health sciences. Regardless, if we as a faculty care about teaching our students ethics and care about shaping responsible future citizens, then we need to address all the possible issues contributing to his result.

Goal B (Well-Being)

Overall Score Distribution by Level (AY 20-21)

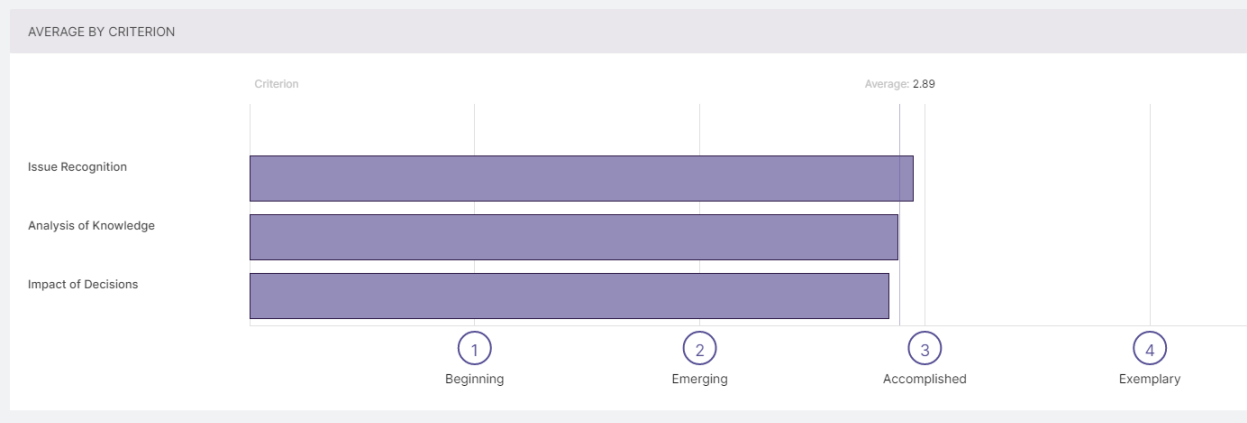
Lower Division Average (by outcome)



The averages for each outcome were:

- Issue Recognition = 2.63
- Analysis of Knowledge = 2.55
- Impact of Decisions = 2.51

Upper Division Average (by outcome)



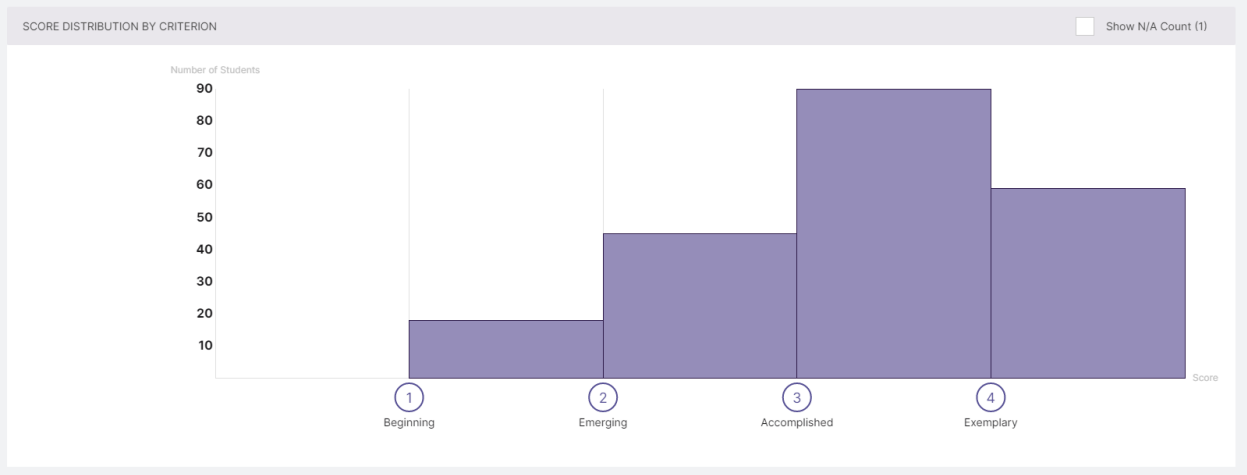
The averages for each outcome were:

- Issue Recognition = 2.95
- Analysis of Knowledge = 2.88
- Impact of Decisions = 2.84

We see, under Goal B, the pattern we would expect to see: growth across each outcome.

Detailed by Outcome

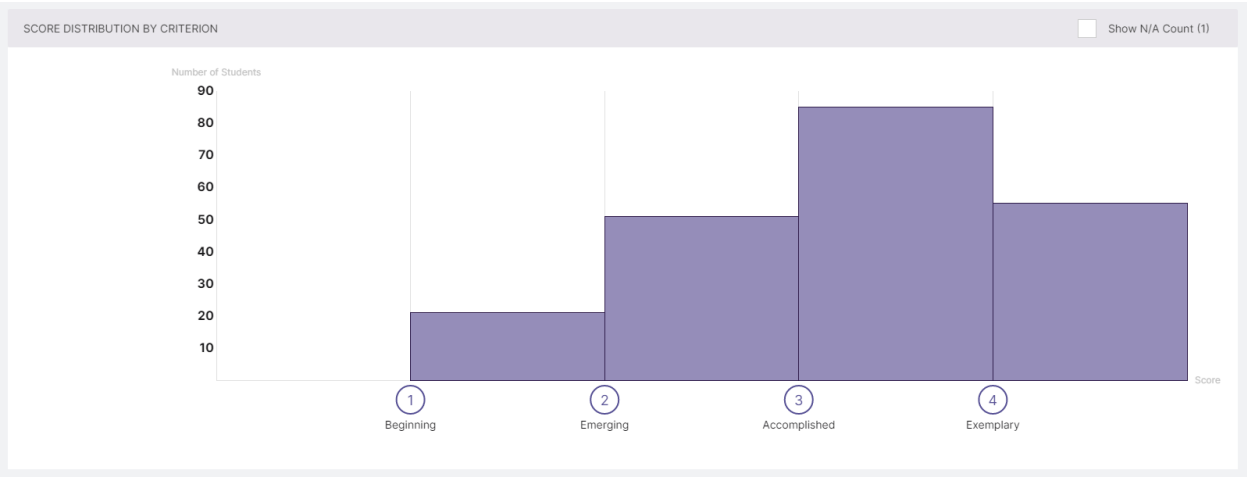
Upper Division



At the upper division, 70.28% of students scored at the “Accomplished” level or higher with 27.83% of students scoring “Exemplary.” This is markedly better than what was seen with Goal A. It also indicates that a majority of students are scoring near the top of the rubric at the upper level.

SLO 2: Analysis of Knowledge

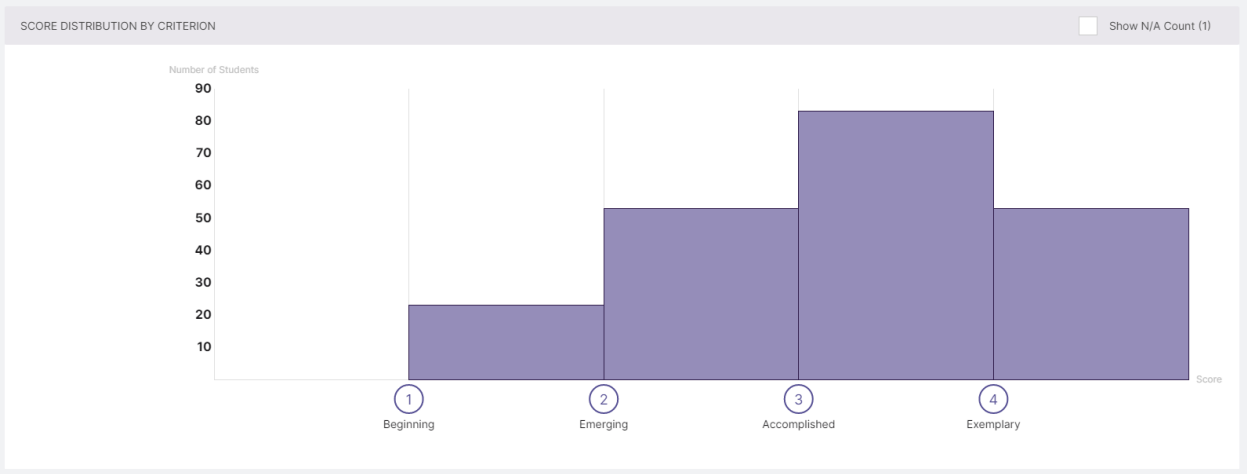
Upper Division



At the upper division, 66.04% of students scored at the “Accomplished” level or higher with 25.94% of students scoring “Exemplary.” This indicates that a majority of students are scoring near the top of the rubric at the upper level.

SLO 3: Impact of Decisions

Upper Division



At the upper division, 64.15% of students scored at the “Accomplished” level or higher with 25.00% of students scoring “Exemplary.” This indicates that a majority of students are scoring near the top of the rubric at the upper level.

Overall, although there is room for improvement for Goal B, that is, it would be desirable to have a greater percentage of students at the upper level scoring “Exemplary,” the trend is in the right direction and students are clearly receiving a firm foundation in this goal, and those that pursue it at the upper level excel at a respectable rate.

Since AY 20-21 was the beginning of the second 4-year assessment cycle for the UCA Core, it afforded an opportunity to compare student learning from the first assessment cycle of responsible living with the second cycle. Below are frequency data for upper division courses for each outcome under each goal of responsible living for AY 16-17. These will provide points of comparison with the present assessment cycle. Again, upper division scores are being focused on since they will indicate ultimate success and skill level among students and thus indicate level of mastery.

Percentage of Scores at Accomplished and Exemplary Levels by Assessment Cycle (Goal A)

Outcome (Score)	Cycle 1 (AY 16-17)	Cycle 2 (AY 20-21)
Ethical Awareness (3)	27.46	24.34
Ethical Awareness (4)	19.72	10.58
Issue Recognition (3)	39.72	26.98
Issue Recognition (4)	8.51	7.41
Ethical Application (3)	29.10	25.27
Ethical Application (4)	5.97	6.59

What is troubling is that these data indicate that since AY 16-17 the rate of students at the "Exemplary" level under goal A has fallen roughly 9% under the "Ethical Awareness" outcome. If we assume that relevant factors remain constant, such as courses offered as upper division in goal A, curriculum of courses in the goal, student aptitude, etc. then this shift indicates a significant decrease in student performance in this outcome. Various factors could account for this, including poor assignment selection or design, or lack of faculty focus on the Core outcomes as explicit points of teaching.

For outcome 2, "Issue Recognition," the results seem similar to what we find in the current cycle. In the current cycle, 7.41% scored "Exemplary." Although this indicates a drop from the AY 16-17 cycle, it is miniscule. What is most striking is that during both cycles well under ten percent of students at the upper level scored "Exemplary" on this outcome.

For outcome 3," Ethical Application," the result is nearly identical to the results for outcome 2. Clearly, we struggle in educating our students to these outcomes under this goal, or at least, our students do not clearly demonstrate mastery in those exercises we have intentionally chosen to have them exhibit their abilities.

Percentage of Scores at Accomplished and Exemplary Levels by Assessment Cycle (Goal B)

Outcome	Cycle 1 (AY 16-17)	Cycle 2 (AY 20-21)
Issue Recognition (3)	30.00	42.45
Issue Recognition (4)	14.74	27.83
Analysis of Knowledge (3)	37.57	42.45
Analysis of Knowledge (4)	9.52	25.94
Impact of Decisions (3)	28.42	39.15
Impact of Decisions (4)	9.29	25.00

For learning outcome 1, during the AY 16-17 cycle, merely 14.74% scored “Exemplary.” However, during the current cycle 27.83% of students at the upper division scored “Exemplary.” This pattern is reproduced for each outcome under goal B.

For “Analysis of Knowledge, “during the AY 16-17 cycle, only 9.52% scored “Exemplary.” During the current cycle, 25.94% of comparable students scored “Exemplary,” indicating an over 270% increase.

For “Impact of Decisions,” during AY 16-17, merely 9.29% scored “Exemplary.” During the current cycle, 25% of students scored “Exemplary,” indicating a 270% increase.

The disparate results between goal A and goal B are intriguing, and it is unclear what factors may contribute to such staggering different results. Goal A remains stagnant, with numbers indicating that students are performing markedly under our expectations for where they should be performing at the upper division. As noted above, factors that may account for this include a lack of a truly scaffolded curriculum, as well as faculty intention in aligning curriculum to core outcomes and designing assignments that prompt students to perform across all components of the goal. However, we see a different result with goal B. Goal B shows significant improvement in student performance across all outcomes. This could indicate faculty better preparing students as well as better designing assignments to address learning outcomes under the goal, or it could reflect that courses designated under goal B are “naturally” scaffolded by the departments that offer these courses as part of rigorous, scaffolded curricula in programs in health sciences, etc.

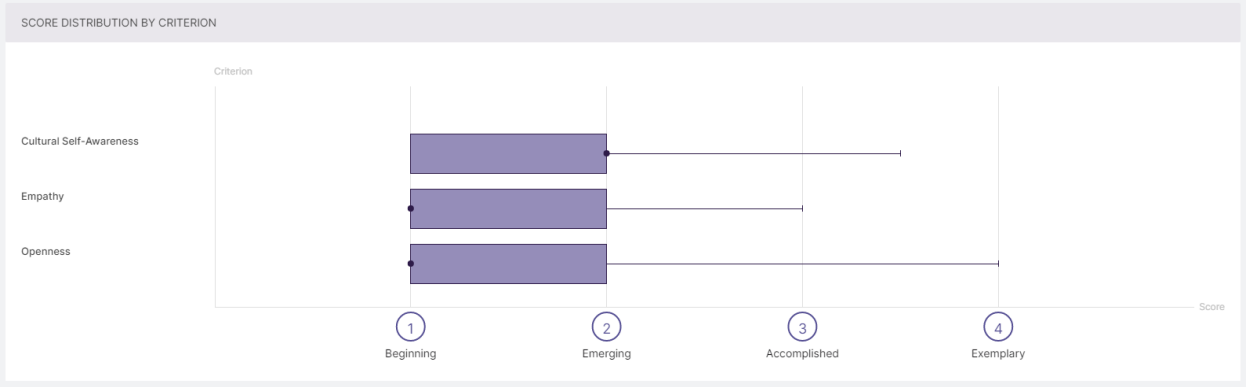
Conclusions and Recommendations

The data support the following observations and recommendations:

1) Faculty participation in terms of survey completion and artifact submission continues to be an issue. Without participation from faculty, assessment of the UCA Core will not be successful. The office of assessment has taken the following measures to address the issue or poor participation rates:
    a. The survey instrument has been revised further to be easier to use.
    b. Survey responses are monitored throughout the semester and chairs are contacted directly and asked to contact faculty who have yet to participate.
    c. Core Council needs to consider if punitive measures for non-compliance may be necessary to incentive those who otherwise might not be motivated to participate.
2) Given that poorly designed assignments continue to pose a problem, one frequently noted by the score teams, pre-cycle training needs to emphasize assignment design. Materials on assignment design need to be readily accessible for faculty. To address this issue, as well as a response to Covid-19, pre-cycle trainings were offered on-line and posted on the UCA Core website for ease of access along with various educational materials. (see "Assessment" at https://uca.edu/core/for-faculty/).
3) With respect to student learning: significant growth was noted in some areas, notably with respect to goal B (Well-Being); growth both from lower division to upper division course work and between AY 16-17 and the current cycle. However, the results for goal A (Ethics) were worrisome, with scores remaining stagnant from AY 16-17 to the current cycle, and most troubling, scores declining from the lower to the upper division. Students at the upper division should demonstrate a greater amount of mastery at higher rates if our curriculum is to be adjudged impactful. If our programming is intended to assist students in developing various intellectual competencies, we must do better than graduating students with less than 1:10 demonstrating mastery. Issues to be considered in the 10-year review will include scaffolding of the UCA Core program with respect to the responsible living competency area, as well as increasing faculty investment in the learning outcomes and curriculum of the Core as it relates to Goal A (Ethics).
4) Given scorer feedback, the rubrics need to be revisited. The 10-year review will offer the opportunity to revisit and revise, if appropriate, the rubrics in the responsible living competency area.

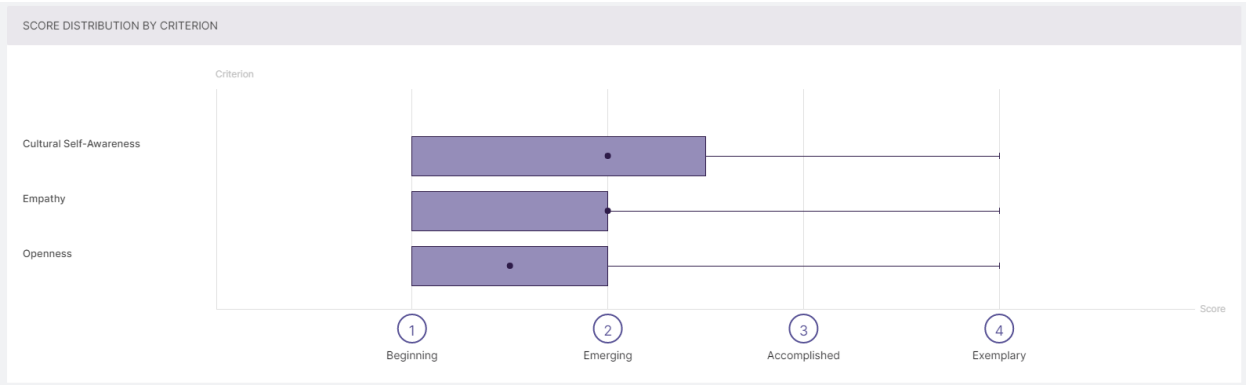
Diversity

Lower Division Overall by Outcome



Averages are not particularly informative for this type of assessment, insofar as we are gauging non-discrete variables, like learning. In addition, at the lower level we would expect to see students at the emerging or developing (1 or 2) levels and that is in fact what we see. Frequency data is much more informative, and then at the upper levels, since it will be more instructive of how well our students have developed across the learning outcomes of the goal.

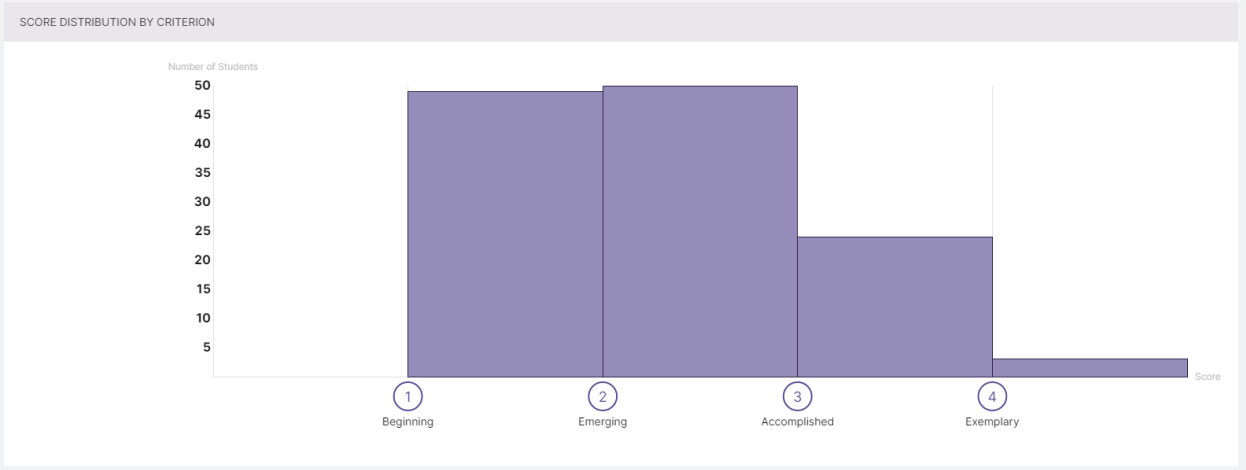
Upper Division by Outcome



Overall, the upper division scores for Diversity Goal A are problematic. One would expect, or hope, that at the upper division, students would be performing much higher on the rubric, with a significant proportion of students scoring at the 3 (Accomplished) or 4 (Exemplary) levels. Instead, the data looks similar to the LD Core data indicating that students do not progress to greater degrees of competence in this area. Although the maximum score for “Empathy” increases for the upper division courses to a 4, this is clearly an outlier as the median score moves up simply to 2. The same pattern occurs with the “Openness” outcome. The median moves slightly, but not enough to demonstrate marked improvement

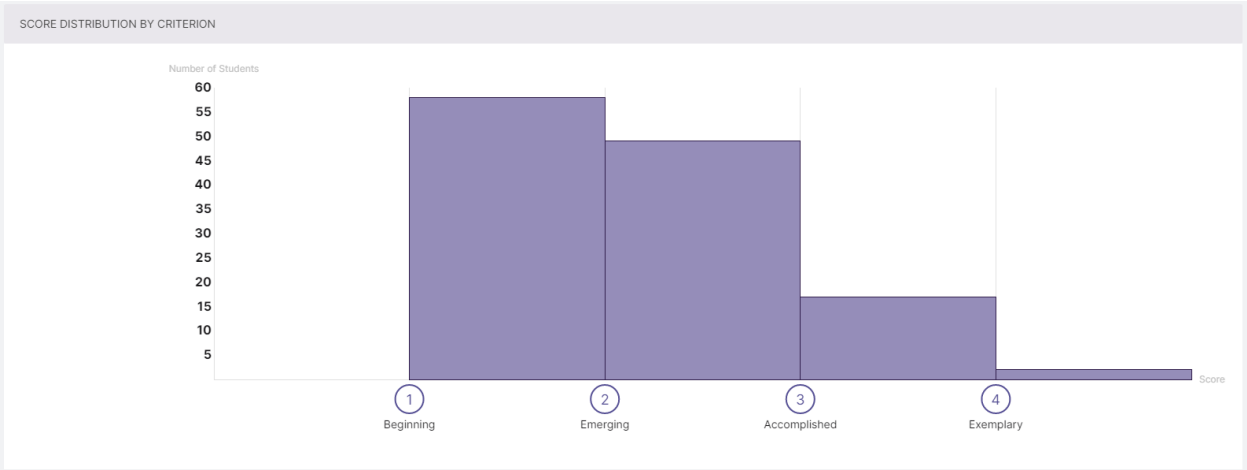
among students, as a detailed look at the upper division by outcome demonstrates. The frequency data tells the story of student performance in upper division coursework.

Outcome 1: Cultural Self-Awareness (UD Core)



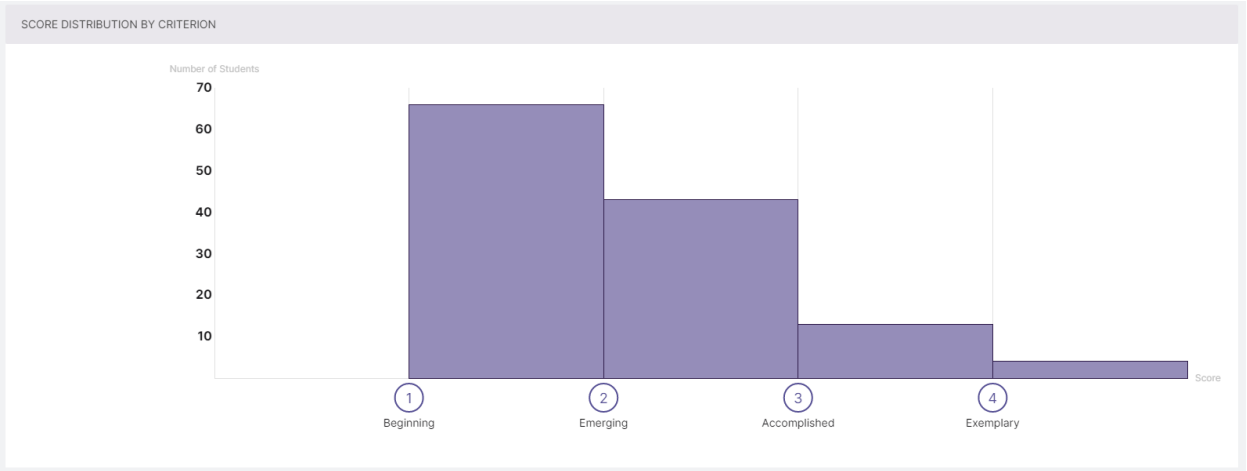
Of note, only 3 of a total 126 artifacts scored registered at level 4, or exemplary. Thus, even though these artifacts represent upper level course work, where students should be demonstrating mastery of this outcome, a mere 2.4% of students demonstrated exemplary performances.

Outcome 2: Empathy (UD Core)



A similar trend is seen for outcome 2. For “Empathy,” only 2 artifacts of 126 scored “Exemplary” on the rubric. This represents a mere 1.59% of students. Thus, we see that students at the upper level are not demonstrating mastery of this outcome. The overwhelming majority are performing at the “Beginning” or “Emerging” levels at a time in their college careers when they should be prepared to matriculate and thus demonstrate mastery of the learning outcomes we claim our curriculum delivers.

Outcome 3: Openness (UD Core)

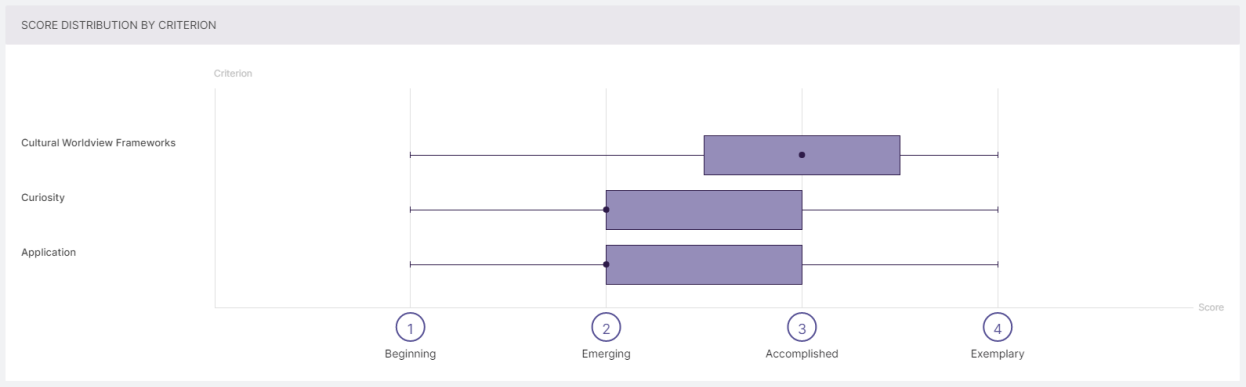


Only 4 of 126 or 3.17% of artifacts scored at the “Exemplary” level, repeating the poor performances seen in the previous two outcomes.

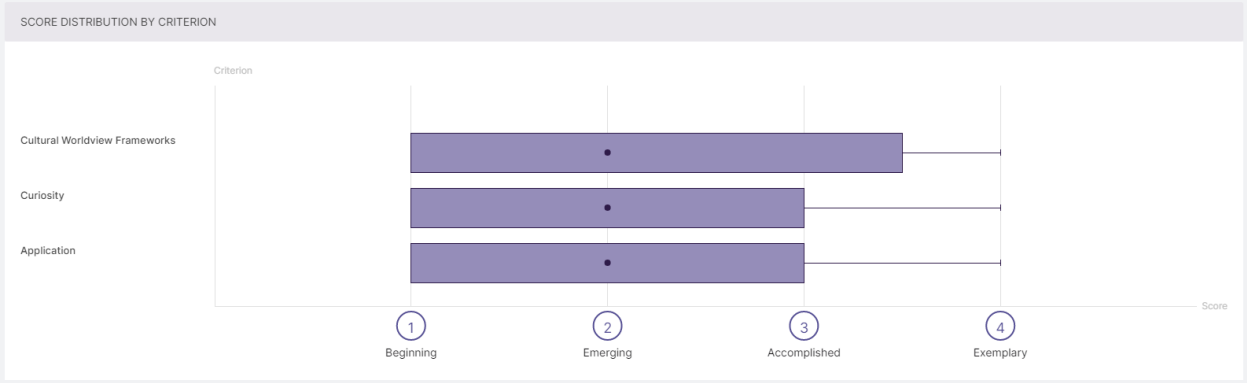
In general, the data reflects trends to be expected. The median score across all outcomes overall was 2, and the median score increased across all outcomes, except for “Cultural Self-Awareness.” Yet the frequency data is clear: very few artifacts demonstrated “Exemplary” performances, which is suggestive of a failure of our students to demonstrate mastery of any of the outcomes under Goal A.

Goal B (Other)

Lower Division Overall by Outcome

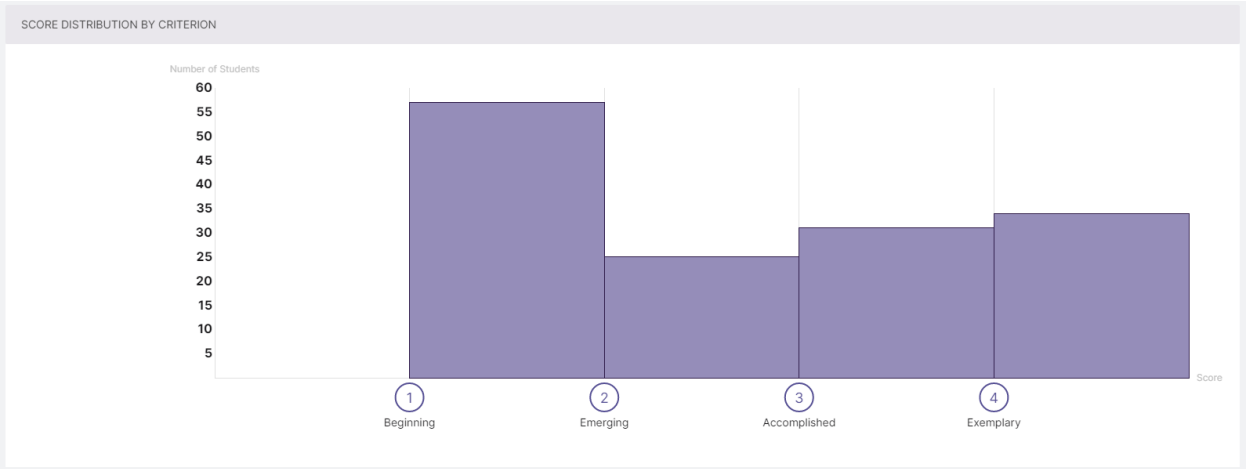


Upper Division by Outcome



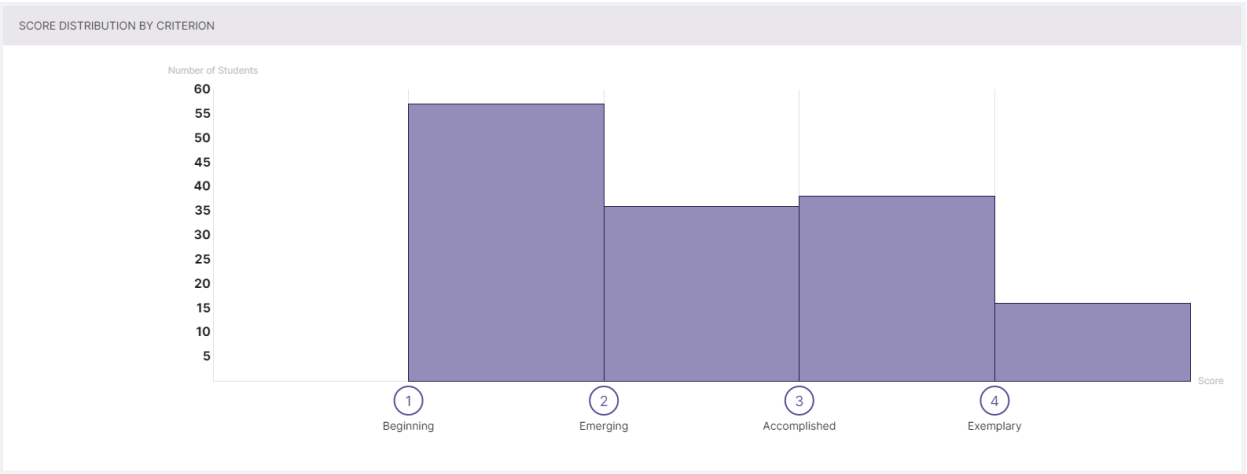
Overall, the upper division scores for Diversity Goal B are stagnant in comparison with the LD Core courses, with the only notable exception being a drop in median score in the Cultural Worldview Frameworks, from a 3 in the LD Core to a 2 in the UD Core. One would expect, or hope, that at the upper division, students would be performing much higher on the rubric, with a significant proportion of students scoring at the 3 (Accomplished) or 4 (Exemplary) levels.

Outcome 1: Cultural Worldview Frameworks (UD Core)



Of note, 34 of a total 147 artifacts scored registered at level 4, or exemplary. 23.13% of students at the upper level scored “Exemplary.” Taking into account the “Accomplished” level, we see that 44.28% of artifacts were scored at a 3 or higher, indicating that nearly half of those artifacts scored in upper division courses demonstrated a level of mastery we’d expect to see at this level. That is reassuring. We can do better, but we are clearly on the right track in this area.

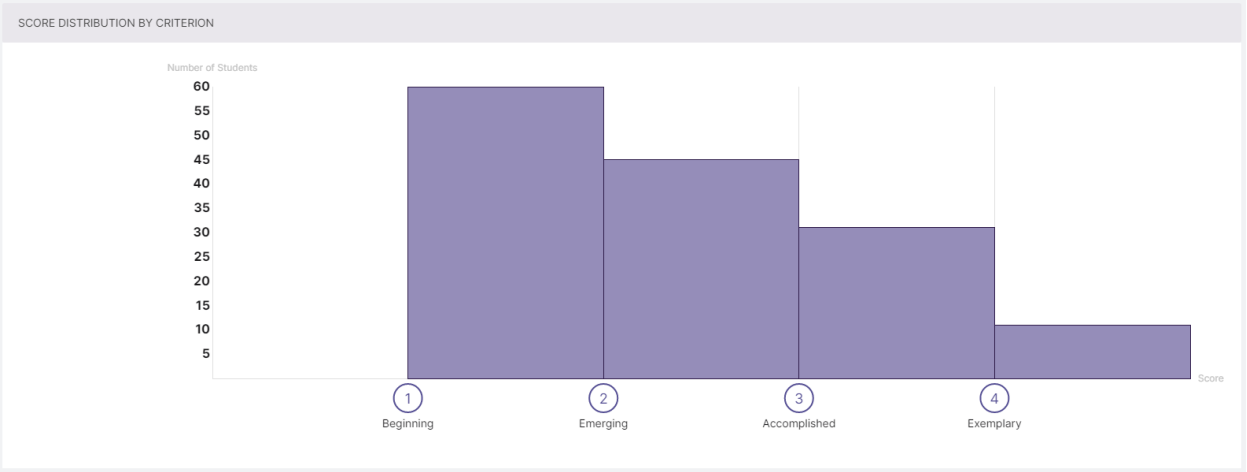
Outcome 2: Curiosity (UD Core)



Outcome 2 does not fare as well. Here only 10.88% scored “Exemplary.” Including the “Accomplished” level, we see 36.73% scoring at a 3 or higher. This is a much better record than we see with goal A, but there is definite room for improvement. The majority of students are performing at the “Beginning” or

“Emerging” levels at time in their college careers when they should be prepared to matriculate and thus demonstrate mastery of the learning outcomes.

Outcome 3: Application (UD Core)

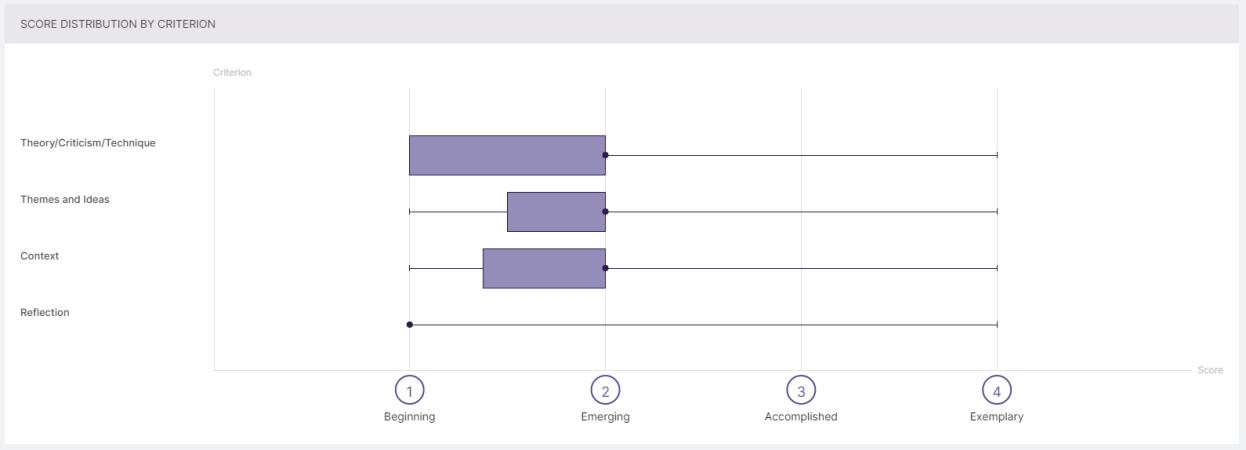


Only 11 of 147 or 7.48% of artifacts scored at the “Exemplary” level, repeating the poor performances seen in goal A. This outcome, specifically, had many issues when it came to applying the rubric to the artifacts. Faculty scorers noted that many times the student work provided simply did not address the outcome and so they could not apply the rubric to the student work. In addition, the distinction between level 3 and 4 was unclear. In general, the opinion of the score team was that this rubric was poorly designed. This poor design led to difficulties in scoring and so the data reflects these issues.

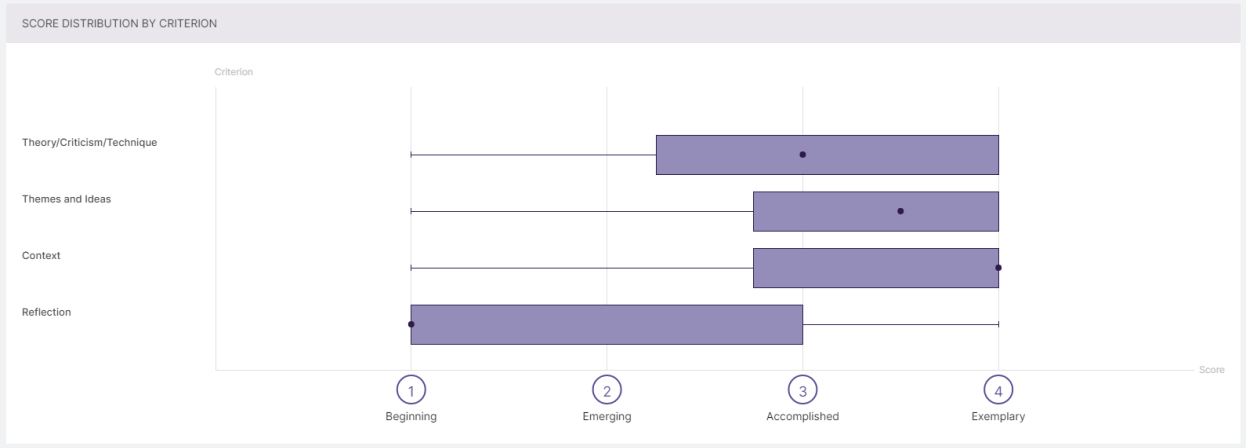
In general, the data reflects trends to be expected. Students do progress, modestly, from the lower to upper division. Although under the Cultural World Frameworks outcome students do well, for the other two outcomes, especially “Application,” very few artifacts demonstrated “Exemplary” performances, which is suggestive of a failure of our students to demonstrate mastery.

Goal C (Creative Works)

Lower Division Overall by Outcome

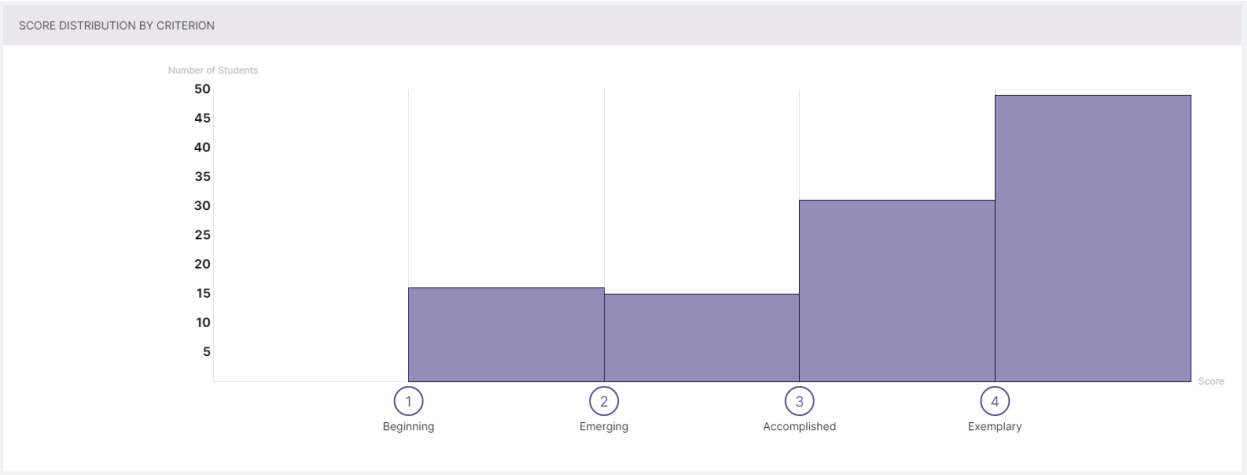


Upper Division by Outcome



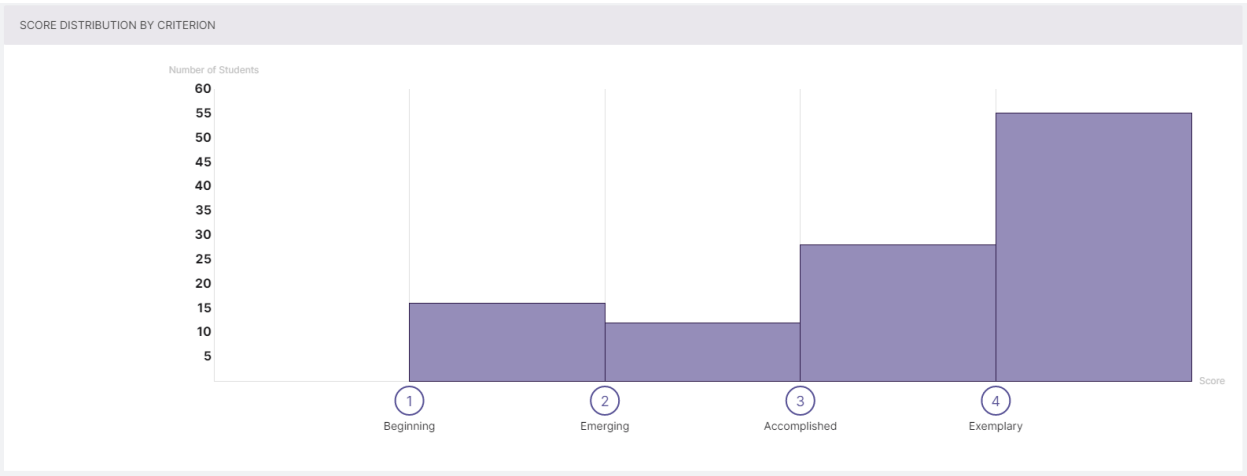
Overall, the upper division scores for Diversity Goal C show significant growth. Note the median increases for Theory/Criticism/Technique, Themes and Ideas, and Context. The jump of the median score in the latter two outcomes is impressive. Yet there is notable stagnation for the “Reflection” outcome.

Outcome 1: Theory/Criticism/Technique (UD Core)



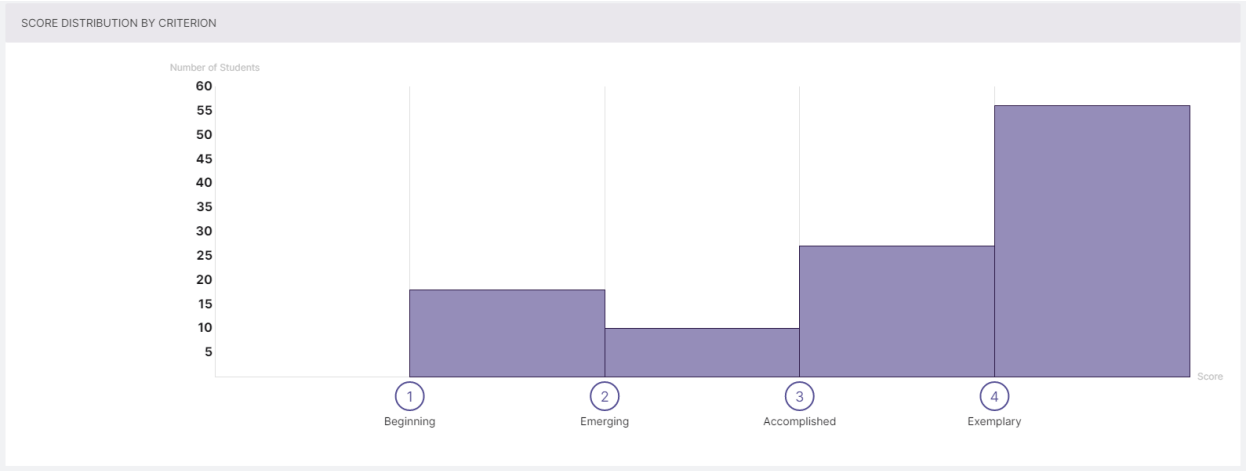
Of note, 49 of a total 111 artifacts scored registered at level 4, or exemplary. 44.14% of students at the upper level scored “Exemplary.” Taking into account the “Accomplished” level, we see that 72.97% of artifacts were scored at a 3 or higher, indicating that well over half of those artifacts scored in upper division courses demonstrated a level of mastery we’d expect to see at this level.

Outcome 2: Themes and Ideas (UD Core)



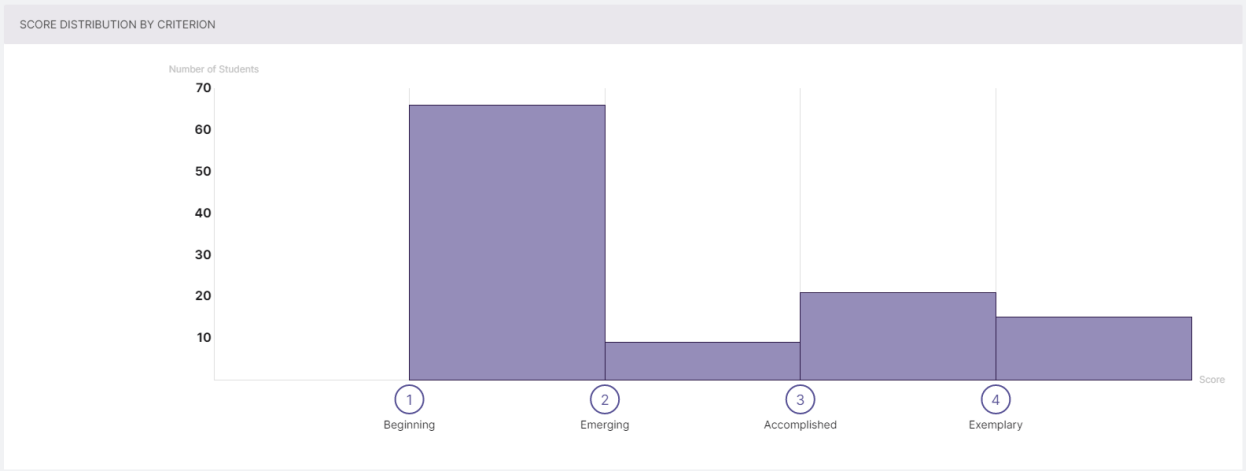
Outcome 2 fares as well as outcome 1. Here 55 of 111, or 49.55% scored “Exemplary.” Including the “Accomplished” level, we see 74.77% scoring at a 3 or higher. This is a much better record than we see with goals A or B. The majority of students are demonstrating mastery.

Outcome 3: Context (UD Core)



Outcome 3 fares as well. Here 56 of 111, or 50.45% scored “Exemplary.” Including the “Accomplished” level, we see 75.68% scoring at a 3 or higher.

Outcome 4: Reflection (UD Core)



Outcome 4 is an outlier. In fact, it is the inverse of the previous 3 outcomes. Here 66 of 111, or 59.46% scored “Beginning” with only 15 of 111 or 13.51% scoring “Exemplary.”

In general, the data reflects trends to be expected, with one notable outlier. Students do demonstrate success at the upper division. The frequency data is unambiguous. Although under the Reflection outcome we see a problematic result, stagnation at the “Beginning” level.

Since AY 21-22 was the beginning of the second 4-year assessment cycle for the UCA Core, it afforded an opportunity to compare student learning from the first assessment cycle of Diversity with the second cycle. Below are comparison tables for upper division courses for each outcome under each goal of Diversity for AYs 2017-2018 and 2021-2022. Upper division scores are being focused on since they will indicate ultimate success and skill level among students and thus indicate level of mastery of the student body over time.

Percentage of Scores at Accomplished and Exemplary Levels by Assessment Cycle (Goal A)

Outcome (Score)	**Cycle 1 (AY 17-18)**	**Cycle 2 (AY 21-22)**
Cultural Self-Awareness (3)	36.13	19.05
Cultural Self-Awareness (4)	8.16	2.38
Empathy (3)	34.46	13.39
Empathy (4)	8.83	1.57
Openness (3)	45.44	10.32
Openness (4)	7.99	3.17

What is troubling is that these data indicate that since AY 17-18 the rate of students at the "Accomplished" and "Exemplary" levels under goal A have fallen, in some cases precipitously. If we assume that relevant factors remain constant, such as courses offered, curriculum of courses in the goal, student aptitude, etc. then this shift indicates a significance decrease in student performance in this outcome. Various factors could account for this, including poor assignment selection or design, or lack of faculty focus on the Core outcomes as explicit points of teaching. From the scorer notes, it seems a plausible interpretation is that the assignments are poorly designed such that they do not align well to the outcomes of the goal, thus not providing students with an opportunity to demonstrate their acumen, or the assignments don't prompt students explicitly to perform across the outcomes.

Related to assignment design problems, but endemic to this competency area, is the fact that assessing outcomes such as openness or empathy are inherently problematic. Although one can request a performance from a student and a student can mimic a response or provide an artifact that indicates performance across these outcomes, all assessments are by definition indirect. That is, there is no necessary correlation between the performance a student presents and the internal belief state of the student. A student can readily perform openness or empathy by simply providing a response consistent

with faculty or scorer expectation without actually holding those beliefs. To state it simply, they can simply tell the professor what she wants to hear. Yet there is a deeper issue present, one related to the notion that the goal of this competency area should be the shaping of belief. The idea that we are assessing attitudes is problematic. It both implies that the instructor's goal is to shape a student's attitude, which is more akin to indoctrination than education, and that we can directly measure attitudes as if a performance reflects, without doubt, internal mental states. This belief may be warranted in cases of mathematics where one can't routinely get the correct answer without knowing the correct procedure, but does not make sense when we are evaluating a belief. Diversity thus poses an issue for assessment. Do we wish to promote viewpoint diversity? If so, then course design can build this in on the front end, and we can assess this based on inputs, that is, how courses are effectively designed to reflect viewpoint diversity. Do we wish to assess dispositions? If so, the epistemic inaccessibility of students' internal mental states means these data will be ineluctably dubious, aside from the more contentious issue that we are then explicitly asking faculty to affect and train student dispositions, an activity some might, not inaccurately, call indoctrination. These issues apply to all the Diversity goals. The best response may be to reevaluate how we assess diversity with an eye on what we are seeking to provide students in terms of educational experiences. Providing for view point diversity may simply require a single goal and outcome set with a focus on curriculum design.

Percentage of Scores at Accomplished and Exemplary Levels by Assessment Cycle (Goal B)

Outcome	**Cycle 1 (AY 17-18)**	**Cycle 2 (AY 21-22)**
Cultural Frameworks (3)	15.69	21.09
Cultural Frameworks (4)	5.39	21.13
Curiosity (3)	16.89	25.85
Curiosity (4)	6.39	10.88
Application (3)	17.31	21.09
Application (4)	8.65	7.48

Simply put, the upward trend in the data Is reassuring.

Percentage of Scores at Accomplished and Exemplary Levels by Assessment Cycle (Goal C)

Outcome	Cycle 1 (AY 17-18)	Cycle 2 (AY 21-22)
Theory/Criticism/Technique (3)	22.93	27.93
Theory/Criticism/Technique (4)	8.92	44.14
Themes and Ideas (3)	23.13	25.23
Themes and Ideas (4)	13.13	49.55
Context (3)	33.95	24.32
Context (4)	9.88	50.45
Reflection (3)	25.80	18.92
Reflection (4)	0.00	13.51

Significant improvement seems to demonstrate much better assignment alignment and design in this area. Note also, all but one of these outcomes is technical in origin, thus indicating improvement in student learning across technical learning outcomes, but not necessarily diversity outcomes, although those did improve as well. The fact that this goal is defined primarily by technical criteria for the arts shows, again, that there are serious problems with the diversity goals and learning outcomes. If this area assesses for diversity, specifically in terms of viewpoint diversity, then couldn't all courses assess under a single diversity rubric? Are three required when one may suffice?

Conclusions and Recommendations

1) Faculty participation in terms of survey completion and artifact submission continues to be an issue.
2) Given that poorly designed assignments continue to pose a problem, one frequently noted by the score teams, pre-cycle training needs to emphasize assignment design. Materials on assignment design need to be readily accessible for faculty. To address this issue, as well as a response to Covid-19, pre-cycle trainings were offered on-line and posted on the UCA Core website for ease of access along with various educational materials. (see "Assessment" at https://uca.edu/core/for-faculty/).
3) Given scorer feedback, the rubrics need to be revisited. For this area specifically, reducing the number of goals from 3 to 1 may be most reasonable. The 10-year review will offer the opportunity to revisit and revise, if appropriate, the rubrics in the Diversity competency area.
4) Given the epistemological obstacle to assessing diversity as a disposition, as well as the moral compunction surrounding the goal of promoting attitudinal transformation in this regard, it may be felicitous to revisit this competency area with a focus on both what the goal should be and whether it is more sensible to assess inputs and curricular design around that goal, such as viewpoint diversity, rather than outputs which are only indirectly measurable and of dubious value regardless.

Effective Communication

During the second cycle of assessment for Effective Communication, there were slight changes to the process. For Goal A (Oral), this time we asked faculty to collect artifacts, but permitted them to sample from the front end, providing a minimum of 5 artifacts per section or 20% of students, which ever number was larger. During the first cycle, the Office of Assessment attempted to collect the population of artifacts by having the Office staff, Dr. Held and Mrs. McEntire, record the student presentations. This proved untenable. There were too many for two staff members to collect. Given that faculty had experience recording lectures, post-COVID, we determined that they were capable of recording student presentations on their own. This guaranteed ample staff to collect artifacts. In addition, given our experience and recognizing both the cumbersome nature of recording all student presentations and the fact that it was unnecessary since a representative sample could be generated without the population, we allowed faculty to randomly sample their course and provide a sizeable sample of student work to the Office of Assessment. Given that Goal B (Written) simply requires the uploading of electronic documents that faculty have already collected, for the most part, by means of Blackboard, we kept the submission process the same for this goal. For Goal C (Collaboration), we changed our process entirely. Given the uniqueness of the area, namely, that it assesses collaboration, the rubric is designed to be applied by students to peers. However, students have no practical experience engaging in this practice, nor can they be calibrated in a way such that the numbers each student provides will be commensurate. As a result, the data provided is effectively worthless. We noted this in the previous cycle. Therefore, rather than waste time collecting meaningless data, we instead simply requested faculty provide a copy of their collaboration assignment, as well as a one-page statement articulating how they use it and the results they've noticed. Such qualitative data may be useful in evaluating the effectiveness of this area. Although all we receive in such a process is a random collocation of anecdotes. Yet, this office maintains that there is value in fomenting collaborative skills in students, but also recognizes that an effective way to do this is by means of assignment design on the front end. But one must admit that not all things of value are assessable, just as surely as not all things that can be assessed are valuable.[7] If we avoid metric fixation and instead recognize anecdotes as meaningful, and dialogue as productive, we may have a more constructive way forward with this goal.

[7] See Jerry Z. Muller, *The Tyranny of Metrics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 18.

Goal A (Oral)

Rubric A poses a unique challenge insofar as it is difficult to collect student work. As oral presentations, each artifact is a recorded presentation. Standardizing format, assuring quality, and simply collecting work is a challenge, but one that is surmountable. However, given the usual issues with low participation rates the sample is only a stratified random sample of respondents, which does not reflect the full student population under this rubric as some courses failed to participate. The data below, therefore, must be interpreted cautiously.

Upper Division Distribution by Criterion

Assessing student performance at the upper division theoretically allows us to discern whether or not students improve from their performances at the lower division. In reality, the scores are more appropriately seen as a benchmark, or window onto student performance at point of matriculation, namely, in advanced level courses near the end of their studies. However, two factors complicate matters. First, our curriculum, although designed to be scaffolded is not in reality so. The reasons for this are twofold: 1) not all upper level courses have prerequisites. So, students may be able to take upper level courses before having had the lower level variant or related experience. 2) Our Core curriculum is not rigorously aligned. That is, students do not necessarily have to take courses in the same goal at both the lower and upper level. Students have to take a course under the competency, for example responsible living, but they can take one under goal A at the lower level and under goal B at the upper level. Thus, their performance does not reflect the effectiveness of intentional curriculum alignment. Under Effective Communication this is less of a problem. All students are required to take a class under oral communication (goal A) and written communication (goal B). So regardless of what courses they

take at the upper level, they will have had a foundational experience at the lower level. Thus, we can see progress more readily in relation to this competency area. In addition, this highlights the importance of upper level instruction, or educational opportunities in this competency, since they can, more so than under other areas, intentionally build upon what was provided at the lower level.

Due to persistent issues of low levels of faculty participation, namely, a small selection of courses that turned in student artifacts, these data may be unreliable. The following courses provided usable artifacts: BIOL4195, BIOL 4V85, CHEM 4112, EXSS 4320, MATH 4301, NUTR 4339, PSCI 4328, PSYC 3340, SOC4360, SPAN 3330, USCH3320. This comprises 11 courses of all courses listed as offered during Fall 22 and Spring 23 categorized under Effective Communication Goal A (Oral). This is an approximately 10% participation rate.

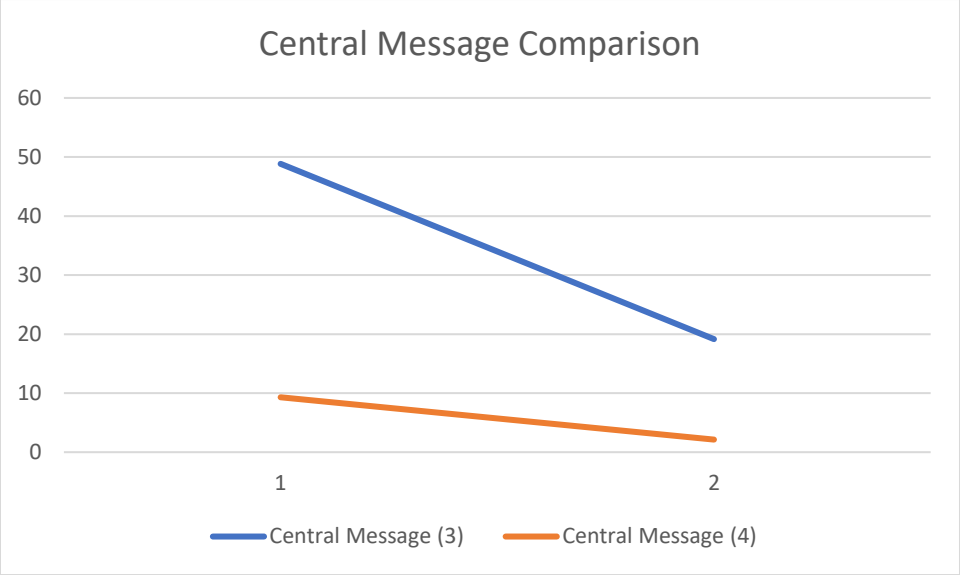
SLO 1: Central Message

Central Message: The topic, thesis, or main point of the communication that is consistent with the purpose of the assignment.

n=47

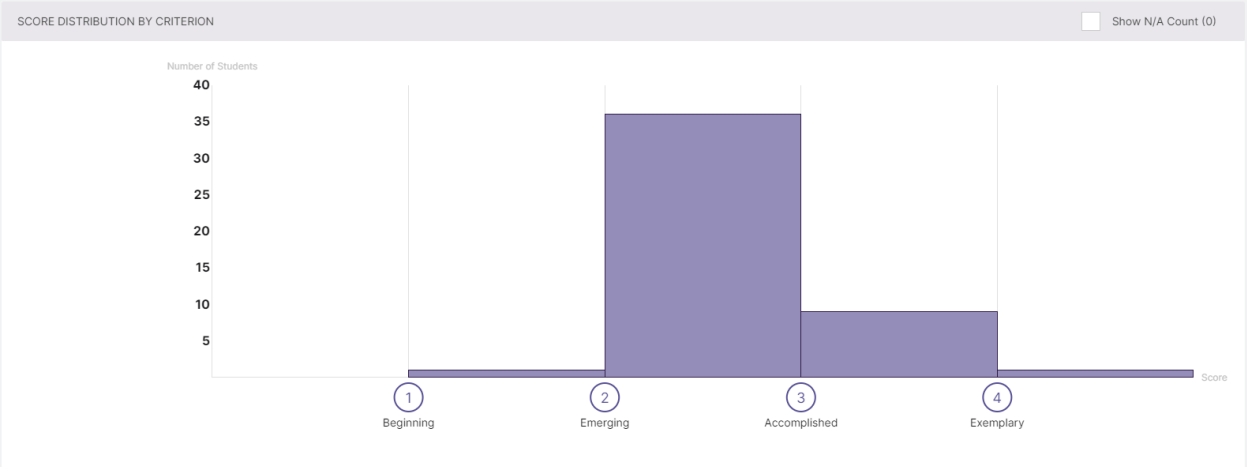
Rubric Score	3	4
# of scores	9	1

By Comparison, with the UD scores of the first (AY 2020) cycle we see:



SLO 2: Organization

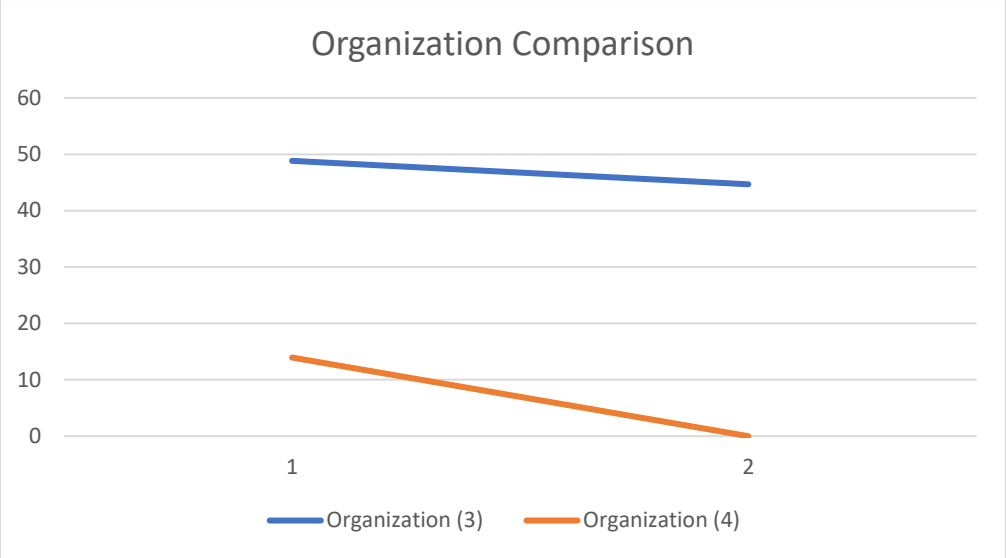
Organization: The grouping of material in the communication, including a specific introduction, conclusion, sequenced material within the body, and transitions.



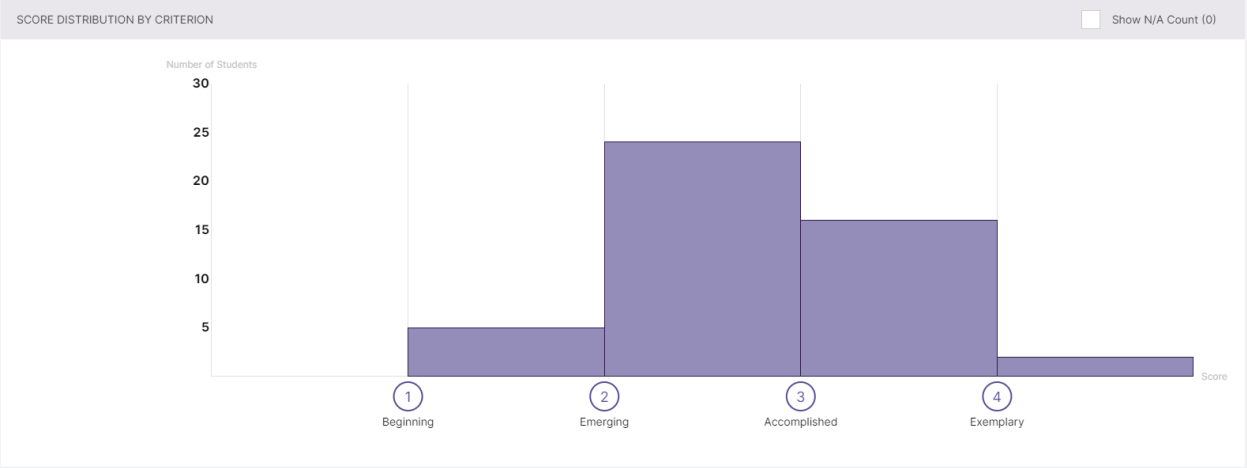
n=47

Rubric Score	3	4
# of scores	21	0

By Comparison, with the UD scores of the first (AY 2020) cycle we see:



SLO 3: Supporting Material/Evidence

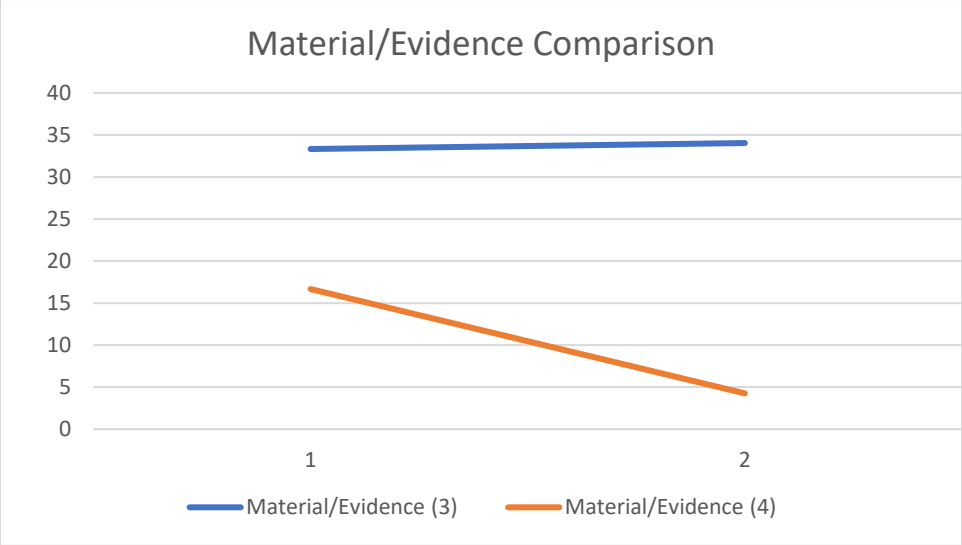


Supporting Material/Evidence: Explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations from relevant authorities, or other kinds of information or analysis that support the central message

n=47

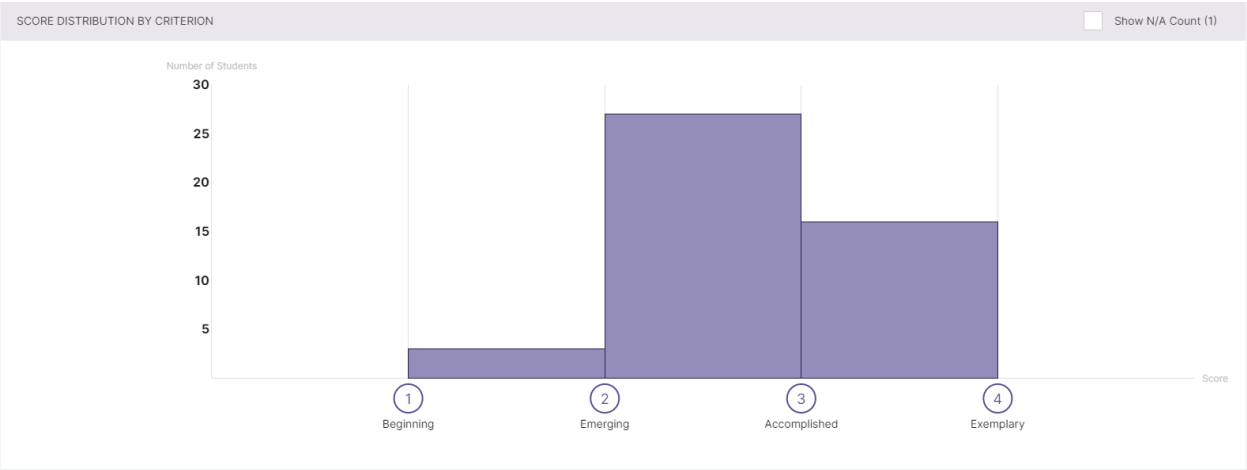
Rubric Score	3	4
# of scores	16	2

By Comparison, with the UD scores of the first (AY 2020) cycle we see:



SLO 4: Context and Audience

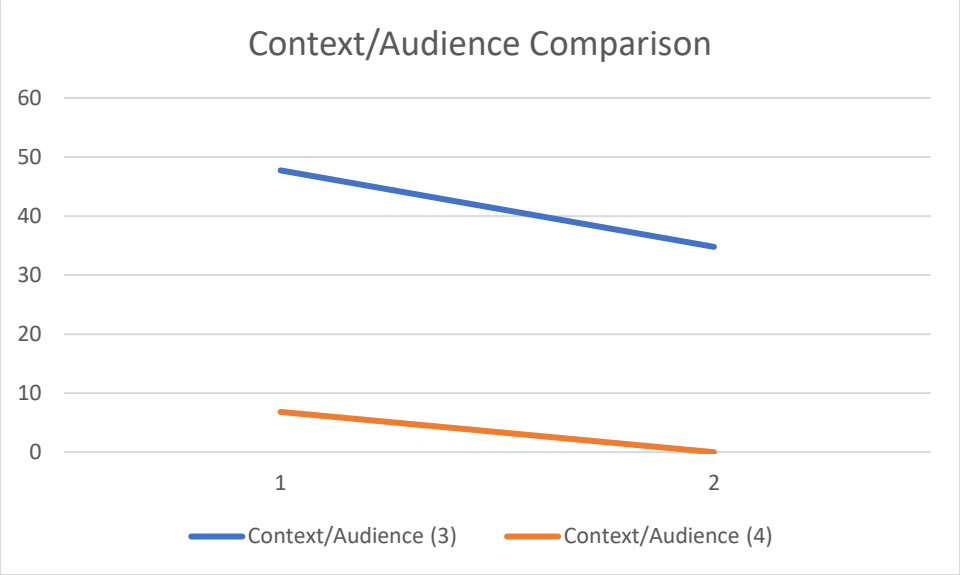
Context and Audience: The people and situations surrounding the communication, including the cognitive, social, and cultural factors that influence the audience and communicator.



n=46

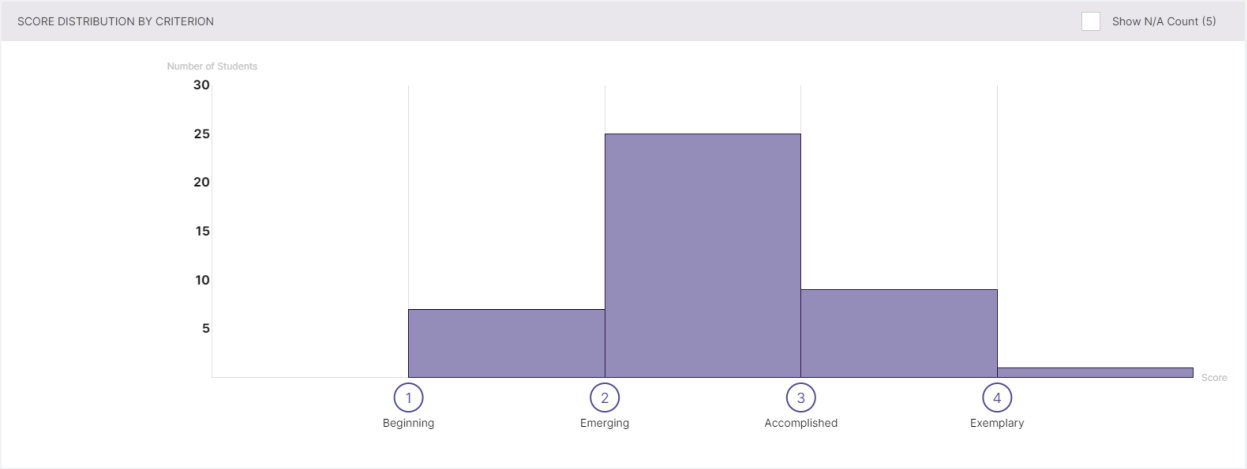
Rubric Score	3	4
# of scores	16	0

By Comparison, with the UD scores of the first (AY 2020) cycle we see:



SLO 5: Delivery

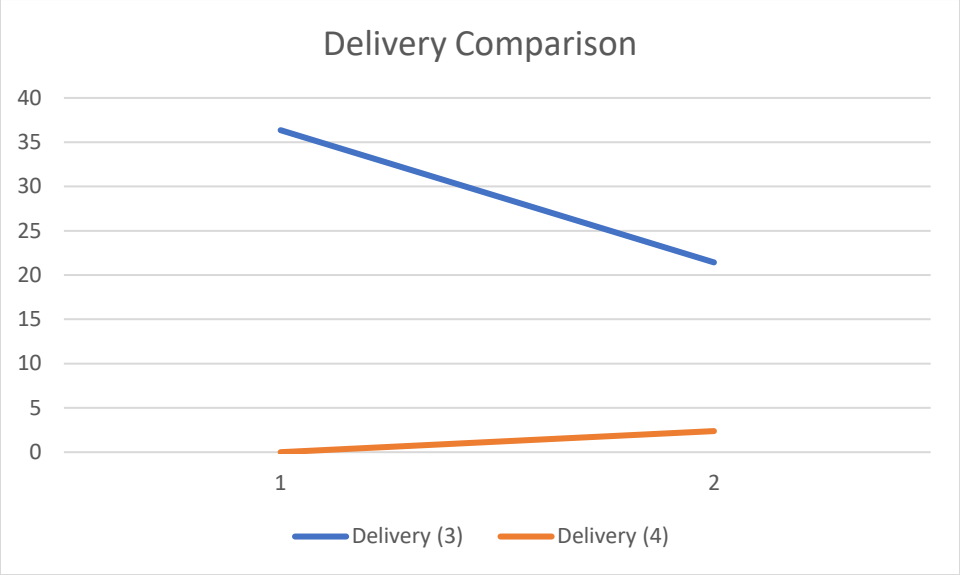
Verbal and Nonverbal Delivery: Posture, gesture, eye contact, vocal expressiveness (loudness, tone, emphasis), and vocal fillers ("um," "uh," "like," "you know," etc.).



n=42

Rubric Score	3	4
# of scores	9	1

By Comparison, with the UD scores of the first (AY 2020) cycle we see:



At all outcomes, the most notable trend is a lack of “Exemplary” scores. Not simply as raw numbers, since the numbers are small as a result of lack of faculty participation, but as a percentage of the scores derived. Thus, even though we had low numbers of artifacts at the upper division, students seemed to fail, consistently, to demonstrate “Exemplary” on any outcome. The table below provides the relevant percentages. Using the table one can see what percentage of student artifacts were scored as “3” and “4” for both the previous cycle and the current one. Two trends are of note. First, the percentage of student work being scored at a “4” has decreased significantly from the previous cycle. Secondly, and most worrisome, on no outcome did 5% or greater of our students score “exemplary.”

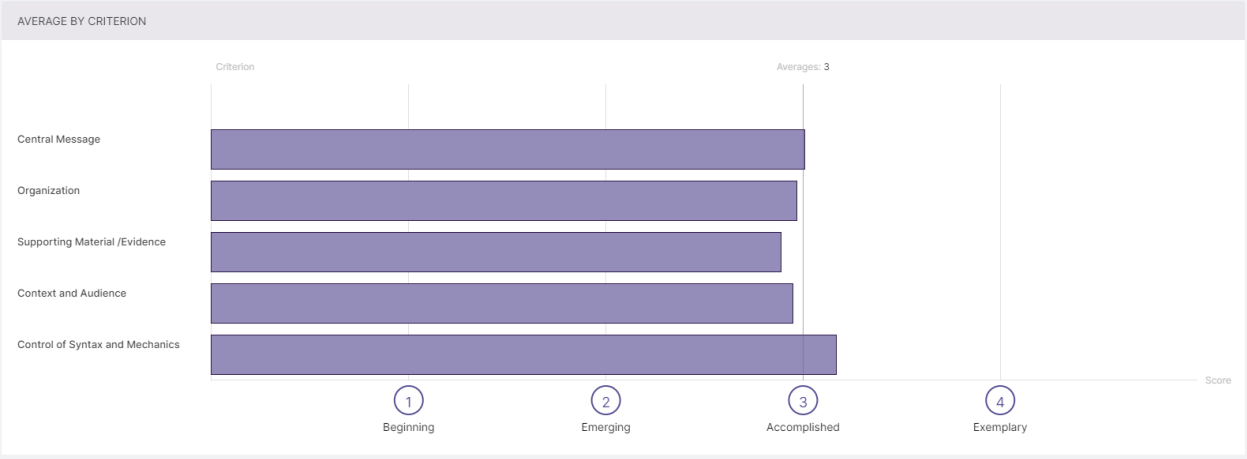
Outcome (Score)	Cycle 1 (%)	Cycle 2 (%)
Central Message (3)	48.84	19.15
Central Message (4)	9.3	2.13
Organization (3)	48.84	44.68
Organization (4)	13.95	0
Material/Evidence (3)	33.33	34.04
Material/Evidence (4)	16.67	4.26
Context/Audience (3)	47.73	34.78
Context/Audience (4)	6.82	0
Delivery (3)	36.36	21.43
Delivery (4)	0	2.38

Goal B (Written)

As noted above, assessing student performance at the upper division theoretically allows us to discern whether or not students improve from their performances at the lower division. The same issues raised in relation to goal A also pertain to goal B.

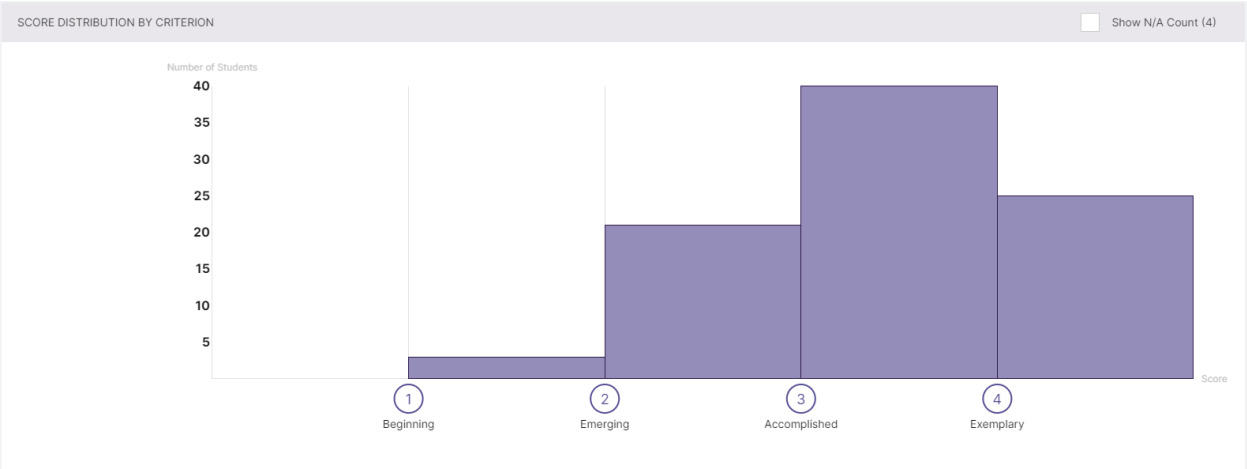
Due to persistent issues of low levels of faculty participation, namely, a small selection of courses that turned in student artifacts, these data may be unreliable. The following courses provided usable artifacts: ACCT4317, BIOL 4195, BIOL 4V85, CRWR4324, ECON4380, GEOG3315, MATH4301, MGMT3315, MGMT4348, MUS 4102, NURS 4315, NUTR4339, PHIL3360, PSCI3316, PSCI 4328, SOC3320, SPAN33300, USCH 3320, WRTG 3310. This comprises 19 courses of all possible courses listed as offered during Fall 22 and Spring 23 categorized under Effective Communication Goal B (Written). This is approximately a 13% participation rate.

Upper Division Average by Criterion



SLO 1: Central Message

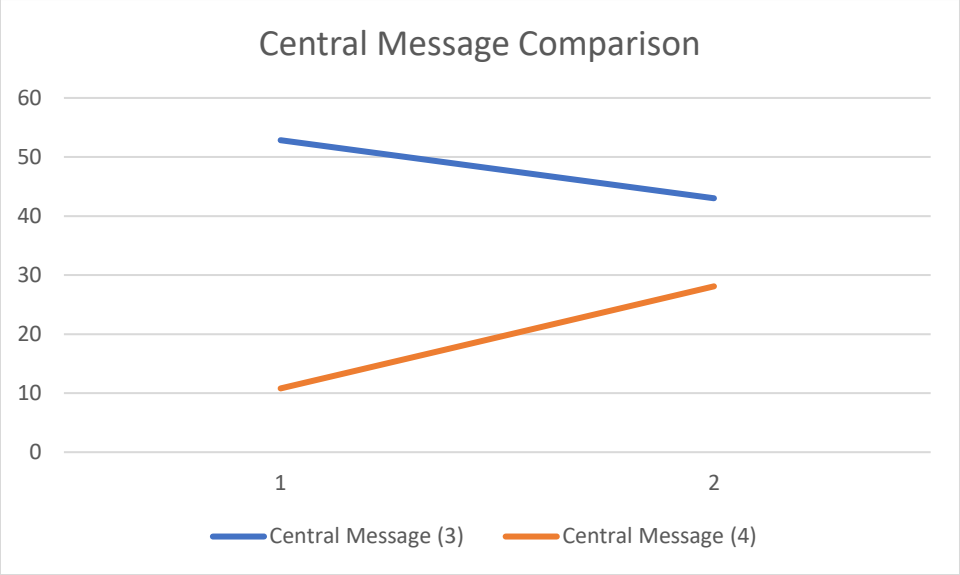
Central Message: The topic, thesis, or main point of the communication that is consistent with the purpose of the assignment.



n=89

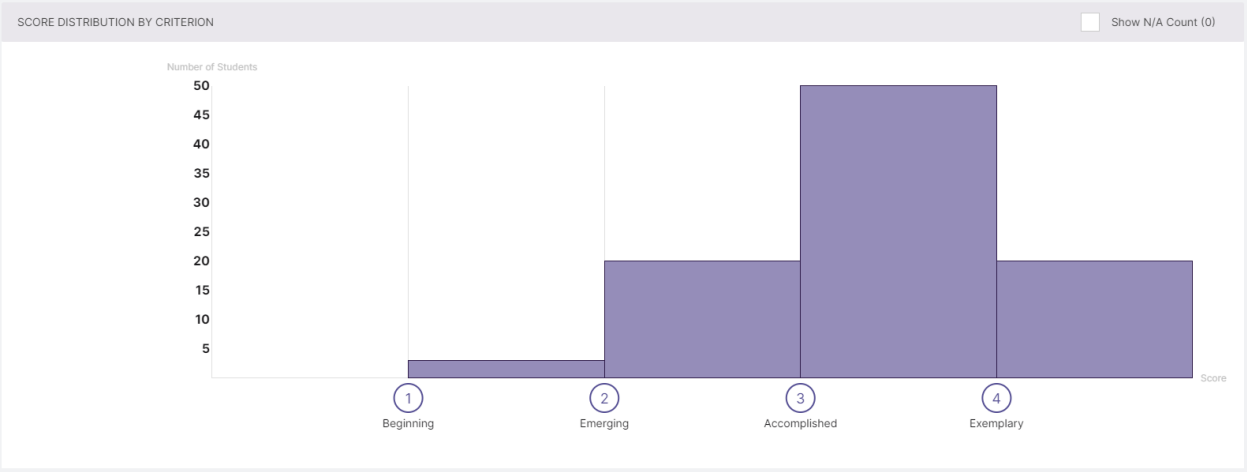
Rubric Score	3	4
# of scores	40	25

By Comparison, with the UD scores of the first (AY 2020) cycle we see:



SLO 2: Organization

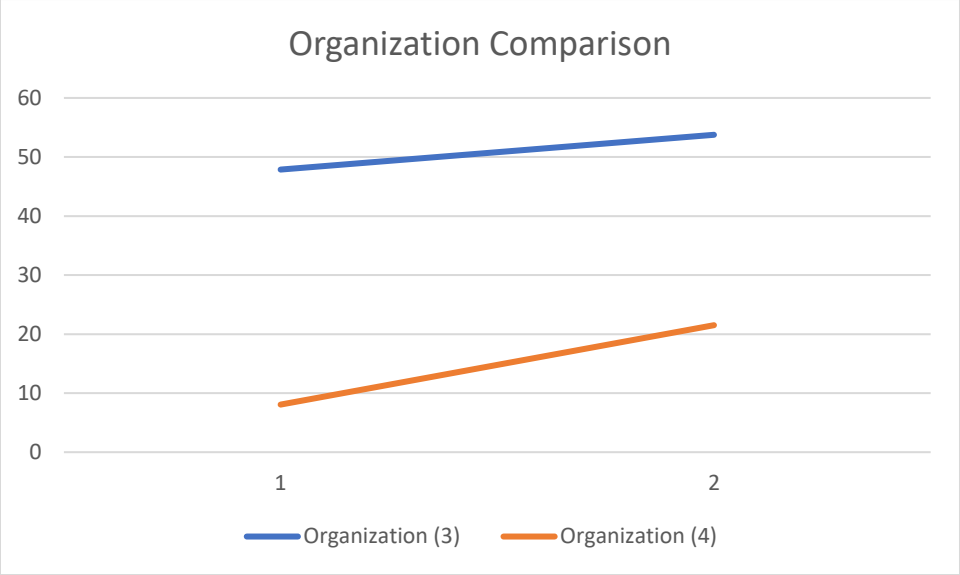
Organization: The grouping of material in the communication, including a specific introduction, conclusion, sequenced material within the body, and transitions.



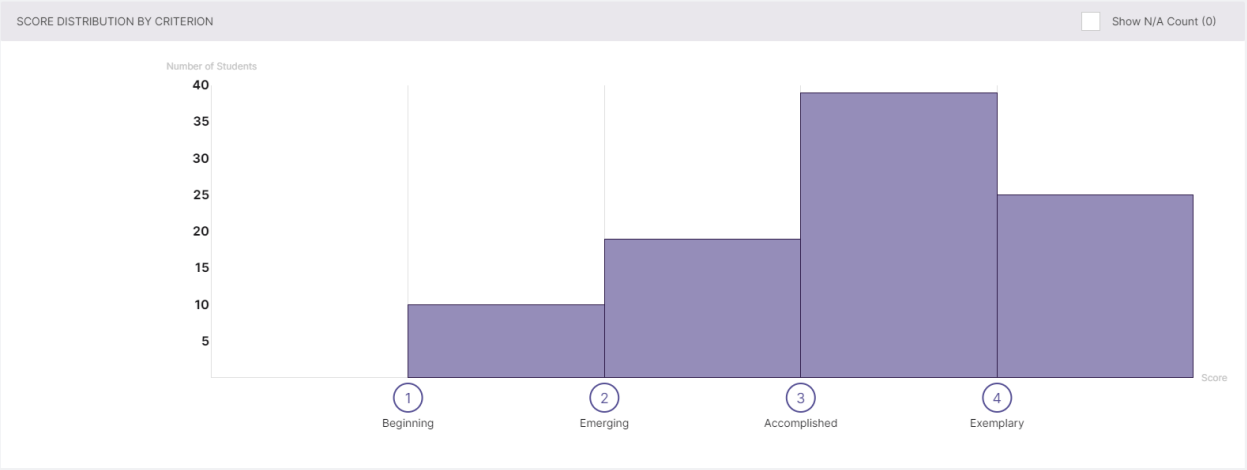
n=93

Rubric Score	3	4
# of scores	50	20

By Comparison, with the UD scores of the first (AY 2020) cycle we see:



SLO 3: Supporting Material/Evidence

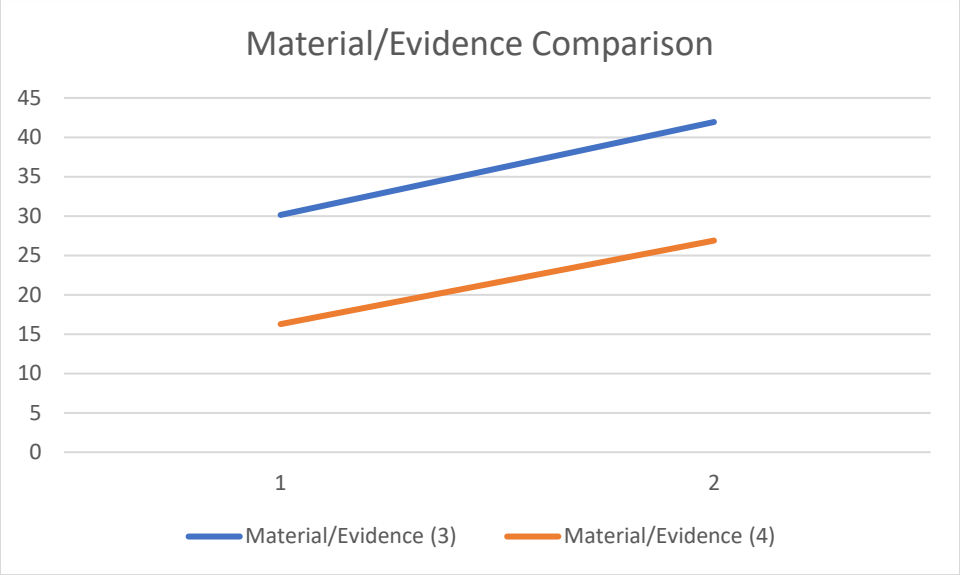


Supporting Material/Evidence: Explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations from relevant authorities, or other kinds of information or analysis that support the central message.

n=93

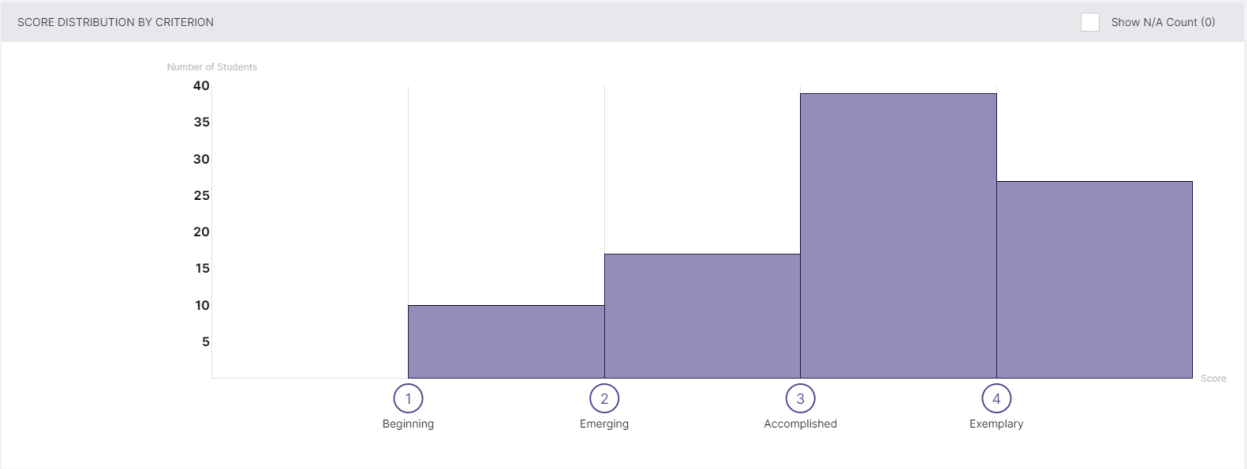
Rubric Score	3	4
# of scores	39	25

By Comparison, with the UD scores of the first (AY 2020) cycle we see:



SLO 4: Context and Audience

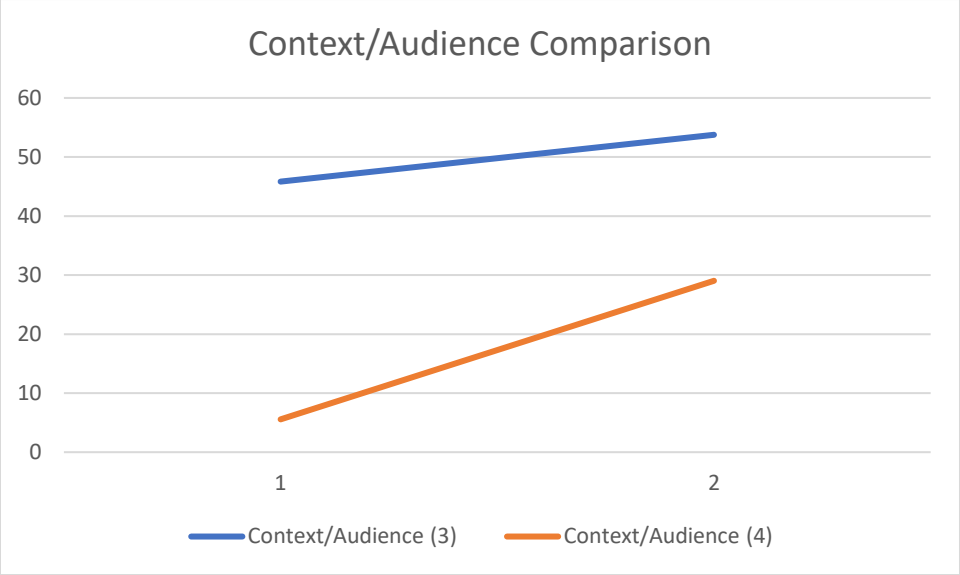
Context and Audience: The people and situations surrounding the communication, including the cognitive, social, and cultural factors that influence the audience and communicator.



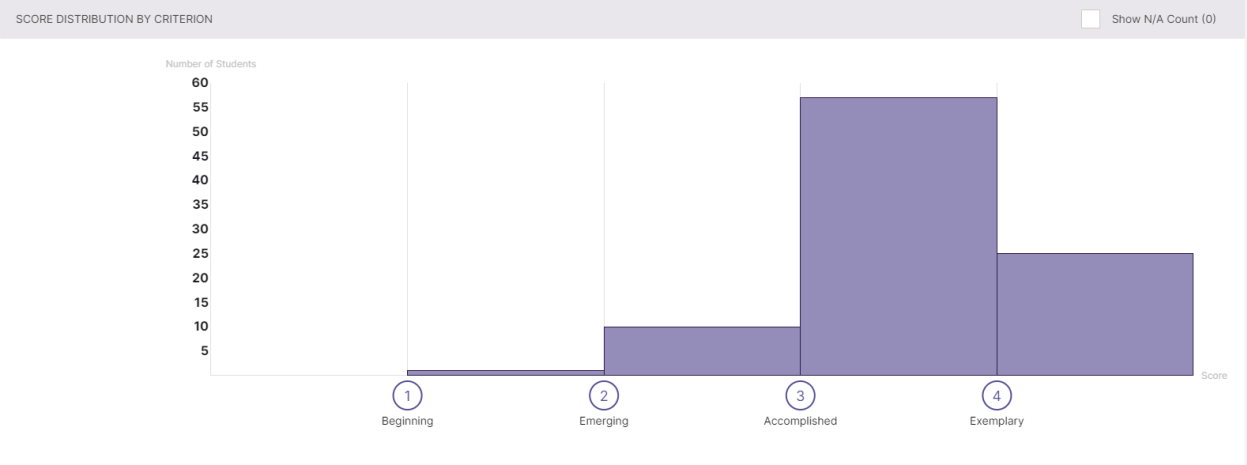
n=93

Rubric Score	3	4
# of scores	39	27

By Comparison, with the UD scores of the first (AY 2020) cycle we see:



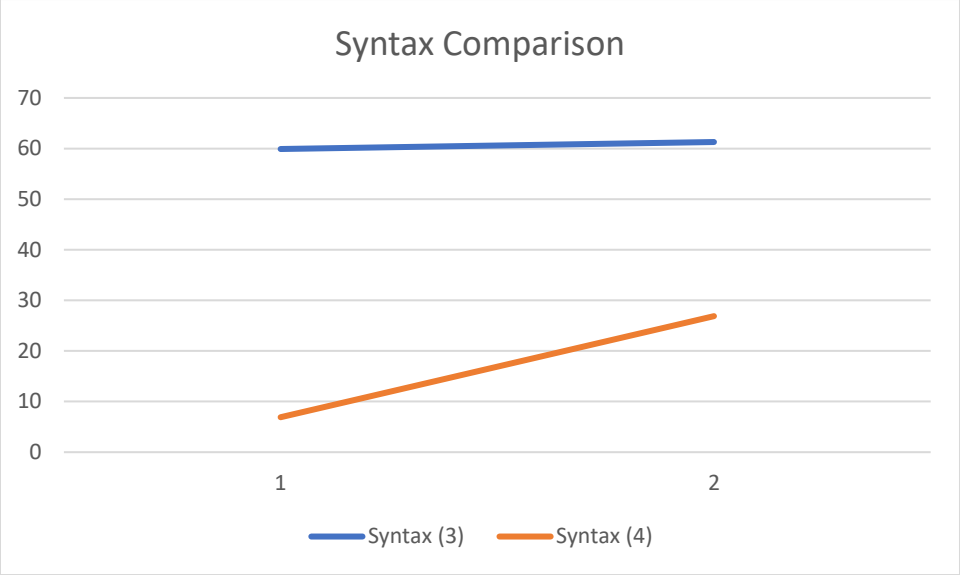
SLO 5: Syntax and Mechanics



n=93

Rubric Score	3	4
# of scores	57	25

By Comparison, with the UD scores of the first (AY 2020) cycle we see:



Outcome (Score)	**Cycle 1 (%)**	**Cycle 2 (%)**
Central Message (3)	52.84	43.01
Central Message (4)	10.8	28.09
Organization (3)	47.87	53.76
Organization (4)	8.06	21.51
Material/Evidence (3)	30.14	41.94
Material/Evidence (4)	16.27	26.88
Context/Audience (3)	45.83	53.76
Context/Audience (4)	5.56	29.03
Syntax (3)	59.91	61.29
Syntax (4)	6.91	26.88

At all outcomes, the most notable trend is significant increases in “Exemplary” scores. The table below provides the relevant percentages. Using the table one can see what percentage of student artifacts were scored as “3” and “4” for both the previous cycle and the current one. Two trends are notable. First, the percentage of student work being scored at a “4” has increased significantly from the previous cycle. Secondly, and most promising, on all outcomes 20% or greater of our students scored

"exemplary." This is marked improvement from the previous cycle, and may be reflective of the intervention adopted after the first cycle, namely, the implementation of a writing across the disciplines (WAC/WID) program. There is more on this below.

Goal C (Collaboration)

Goal C (Collaboration) of the Effective Communication competency area is defined as: Students will apply appropriate verbal and nonverbal strategies to promote collaboration.

This rubric assesses the following two specific skill or knowledge areas:

- Individual Contributions: The contributions of a single student that advances a group project, including the timely completion of assigned tasks, thorough and comprehensive work, articulating the merits of alternative ideas or proposals, building constructively upon the contributions of others, and being punctual, focused, and prepared.

- Fosters Constructive Team Climate: Student behaviors that promote collaboration among group members, including being respectful and positive, motivating and assisting teammates, and engaging with teammates in ways that facilitate their contributions.

This rubric was designed to be applied by students to peers. This is both intuitive and inopportune. It is intuitive insofar as if you want to evaluate a student on his/her performance in a group, the only individuals with intimate knowledge of those performances would be other members of the group. It is inopportune insofar as the reliability of scores will be suspect. It is impracticable to calibrate all students on the rubric to assure that interrater reliability is within an acceptable level. One simply cannot train all students on the rubric and its application, not to mention that the scorer is scoring a member of their own group thus adding an element of bias into the process. This process is fundamentally flawed.

The data collected during the previous cycle bear out the observations noted above. The overall average on this rubric was a 3.68, with median scores at both the LD and UD levels of assessment being a 4, the topmost score. Students, thus, scored their classmates remarkably high suggesting one of several possible hypotheses. First, students filled out the rubric to the best of their ability and indicated a stellar performance by everyone. This interpretation would be indicative that students weren't critical in their discernment since, it is unreasonable to presume that everyone is excellent. Second, the consistent high scores may indicate a lack of interest in completing the rubric thus scoring all members a 4 out of ease. Third, students may have scored their classmates as exceptional out of courtesy motivated by empathy or a misunderstanding that this score may impact a classmate's grade, thus a 4 indicates an act of charity. Regardless, the scores, and the method by which they were obtained, indicate a fundamental flaw in assessing these outcomes by the method adopted.

Given the results and the hypotheses proffered accounting for the results, this past cycle we changed our procedure for assessing “collaboration.” Instead of approaching the area as we do other outcomes, that is, looking at performances and scores and comparing LD to UD Core performances to adjudge relative improvement, we adopted a “qualitative” approach. Although there are serious limitations to “qualitative” assessment, as it functionally elevates anecdotes to data, there is a benefit to having faculty think through collaboration beforehand, so they might be more intentional when initiating collaboration exercises. Thus, what we asked for this assessment cycle was a description or copy of the assignment and a short (1 page) explanation of how this assignment intentionally addresses and reinforces collaboration. Unfortunately, as with most areas of Core assessment, we had a faculty participation problem. In this case a meagre handful of faculty submitted materials. This is a goal that clearly needs to be reimagined, either in terms of how to assess it, or even whether we should attempt to do so. Course design may be a more productive use of resources.

Conclusions and Recommendations

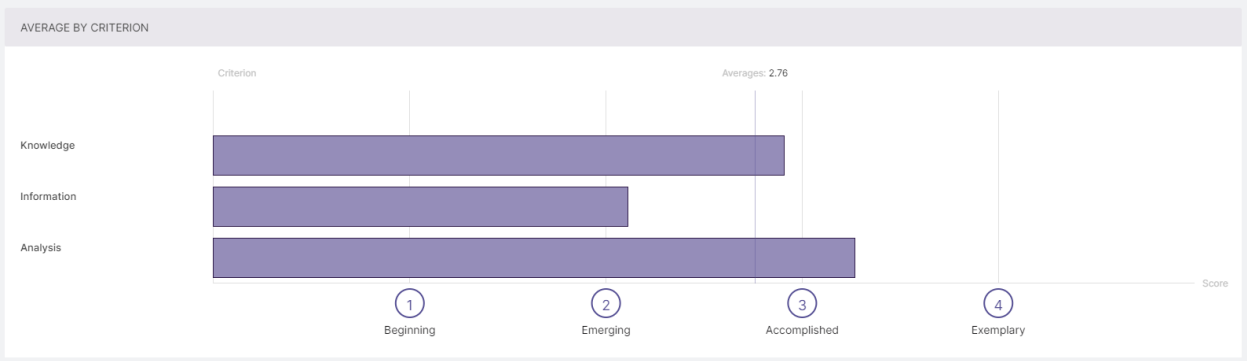
- Goal A: At the lower division, we see students performing as expected. That is, they are solidly scoring across all outcomes demonstrating that at the lower division a foundational education is being provided. Students are being expected to perform across all outcomes, and they are doing so at the level one would expect in an introductory level course, such as COMM 1300, where most of this work is, in fact, done. Yet, at the upper level we have a more troublesome trend. Not only are students seemingly performing more poorly than they did in the last cycle, but they are not demonstrating exemplary skills in oral communication. As a fundamental skill, this is worrisome. Our students need to be better educated in oral communication. When this type of result was noted last cycle, with respect to written communication, we recommended that we adopt a "writing across the curriculum" style approach to written communication. We provided funds for a course release for a content area expert (Dr. Jen Talbot) and thus provided resources to faculty to better develop and evaluate writing in different disciplines and across all levels. If the numbers indicated above under Goal B reflect a real trend, then one conclusion is that the WAC/WID approach has worked. Operating under this assumption, we strongly recommend we adopt a similar approach to oral communication, namely, a communication across the curriculum (CAC) approach. After consultation with Drs. Nelle Bedner and J. J. McIntyre, as well as meetings with Dr. Carey Clark and Katherine Bray from the Center for Writing and Communication we are convinced this is feasible.
- Goal B: The data is indicative of general improvement across all learning outcomes, both from the lower to upper division and from the first cycle to the most recent. This would suggest that not only are students improving from introductory level course work to upper level work, thus developing more advanced written communication skills, but that they are also doing so at a greater rate of success than they did four years ago. The most notable change in curriculum since the first cycle is the addition of a WAC/WID program on campus, directed by Dr. Jen Talbot. Whether one could demonstrate a causal link between the two is doubtful, as higher education assessment doesn't afford much opportunity of demonstrating such a connection between a singular intervention and broad outcomes over time. But the addition of a WAC/WID program on campus is a significant change that co-occurred with improved scores. One need not fall victim to the *post hoc ergo prompter hoc fallacy* to recognize a feasible connection between the two. Of note are the facts that: 1)

Almost fully a quarter of all students scored at the UD level scored “exemplary” on all the outcomes under written communication, 2) this is a marked increase from the past cycle where less than 10% of students were scored at this level. And 3) there is an increase in the percentage of students scoring a “3” at the upper level. Thus, if the data is reliable, our students are outperforming the previous cohort significantly.

- Goal C: This area needs to be revisited. We need to re-evaluate assessment in this area, entirely. Does it need to be assessed? If so, what is an effective way to do so? If not, what is the alternative? Mandated faculty development? Online resources? Nothing? These are issues to be revisited during the 10-year review.
- Overall: Compliance continues to be an issue. Faculty participation this cycle was shameful. Poor compliance means a skewed sample from which to derive data, which in turn means unreliable data and corrupted results. Poor results lead to distrust of the process and a cycle begins that foments increasing distrust and distaste for assessment reinforcing a self-fulfilling narrative of the lack of value of assessment. Increased participation would lead to better results, more useful results, and thus increase support for assessment. In addition, the more faculty participate in, and come to understand the process of, assessment the less likely they are to be hostile towards it. Some may even begin to find value in it. At least that has been the experience of this Office in the past. Compliance is crucial.

Critical Inquiry

Goal A (Inquiry and Analysis)



Outcome	Average
Knowledge	2.91
Information	2.11
Analysis	3.27

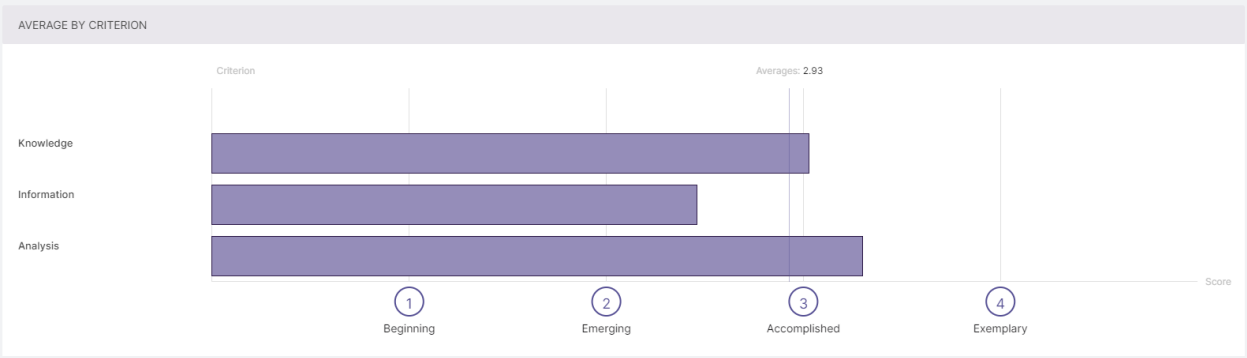
	1	2	3	4	N/A	Total	Average
Knowledge	25	65	126	78	1	294	2.91
Information	16	241	30	8	0	295	2.11
Analysis	2	21	170	97	5	290	3.27

At the lower division we expect to see consistent scores at low (1) to mid-level (2-3) on the rubric. We expect to see this for various reasons. First, these are introductory level classes with first or second year students so one would not anticipate them to excel on a rubric designed to gauge student performance through a student's entire college career. In addition, the assignments in these courses are often designed to introduce and reinforce basic skills thus usually not requiring or even affording students the opportunity to demonstrate mastery. As foundational courses, we would expect assignments to prompt students to demonstrate basic level competence, and we would hope students would be able to perform at a basic level. The data supports the statement that our students, at the lower level, consistently demonstrate competence across all learning outcomes for Goal A. Although we rarely see students perform exceptionally, namely, receiving a 4 on the rubric, the vast majority of students score a 2 or 3, indicating skill levels at the "emerging" or "accomplished" level. We would anticipate this result,

and ought to be reassured that the data verifies our hope that students at the lower level are receiving a solid education in oral communication.

One point of interest is the lower, on average, score for SLO 2, or information. This outcome evaluated students' ability to select appropriate and credible information based on knowledge of topic and discipline. The data are not instructive as to why students might perform better on other outcomes than this one, nor were there any scorer comments or discussion indicating a flaw with this rubric or poor assignment design. With no evidence providing support for a hypothesis any conclusion drawn from this anomaly would be baseless speculation. Thus, the only conclusion to be drawn is that students do not perform as well on this outcome as the others, even though their performance is consistent with expectations for introductory level courses. The skill of discerning appropriate and credible sources and using them effectively is also integrated into the Effective Communication competency of the UCA Core, and thus students may get this skill reinforced through additional coursework.

Upper Division Distribution by Criterion (Rubric A: Inquiry and Analysis)



Outcome	Average
Knowledge	3.03
Information	2.46
Analysis	3.30

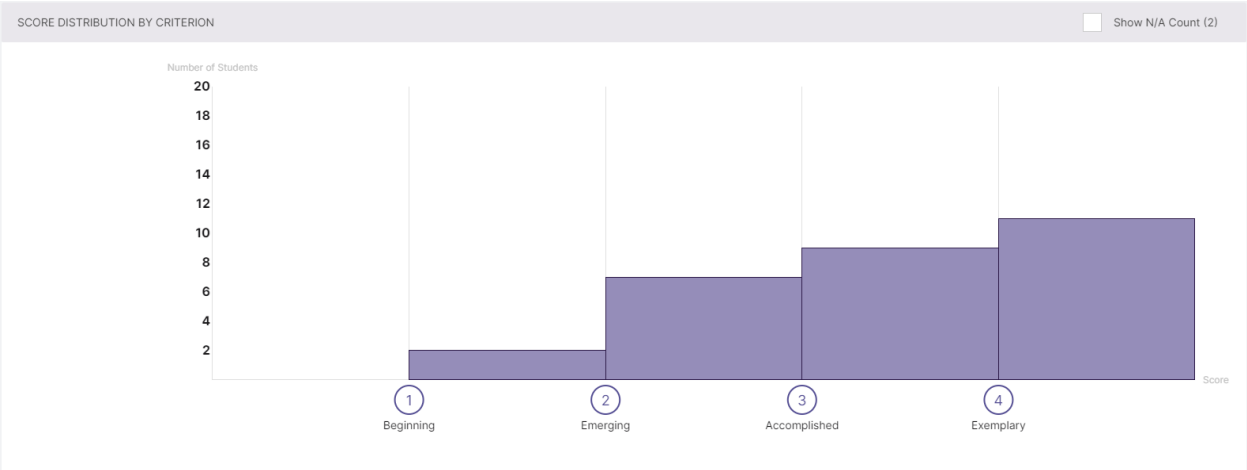
Assessing student performance at the upper division theoretically allows us to discern whether or not students improve from their performances at the lower division. In reality, the scores are more appropriately seen as a benchmark, or window onto student performance at point of matriculation,

namely, in advanced level courses near the end of their studies. However, two factors complicate matters. First, our curriculum, although designed to be scaffolded is not in reality so. The reasons for this are twofold: 1) not all upper level courses have pre-requisites. So, students may be able to take upper level courses before having had the lower level variant or related experience. 2) Our Core curriculum is not rigorously aligned. That is, students do not necessarily have to take courses in the same Goal at both the lower and upper level.

Due to persistent issues of low levels of faculty participation, namely, a small selection of courses from which we receive student artifacts, these data may be unreliable.

SLO 1: Knowledge

An understanding of the concepts and/or principles in the discipline and how they relate to important questions.

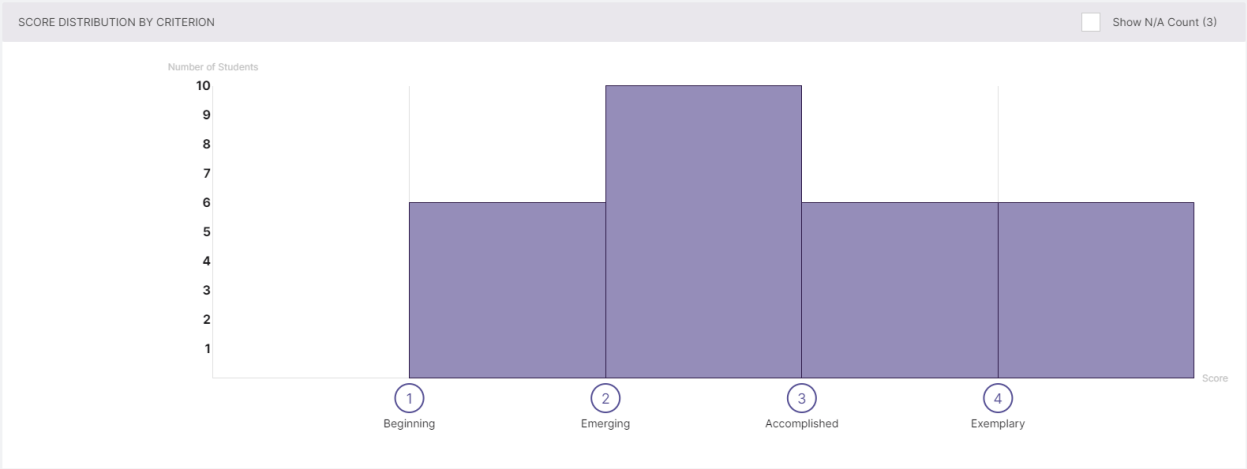


n=31

Rubric Score	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**N/A**
# of scores	2	7	9	11	2

SLO 2: Information

Selecting appropriate and credible information based on knowledge of topic and discipline.

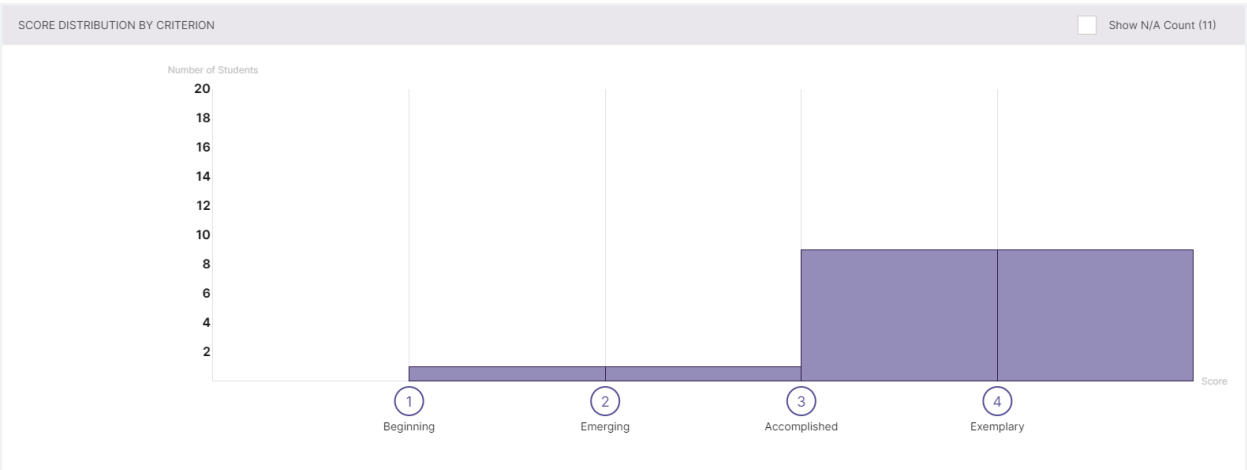


n=31

Rubric Score	1	2	3	4	N/A
# of scores	6	10	6	6	3

SLO 3: Analysis

Evaluating a position and/or drawing conclusions on significant questions in the discipline.



n=31

Rubric Score	1	2	3	4	N/A
# of scores	1	1	9	9	11

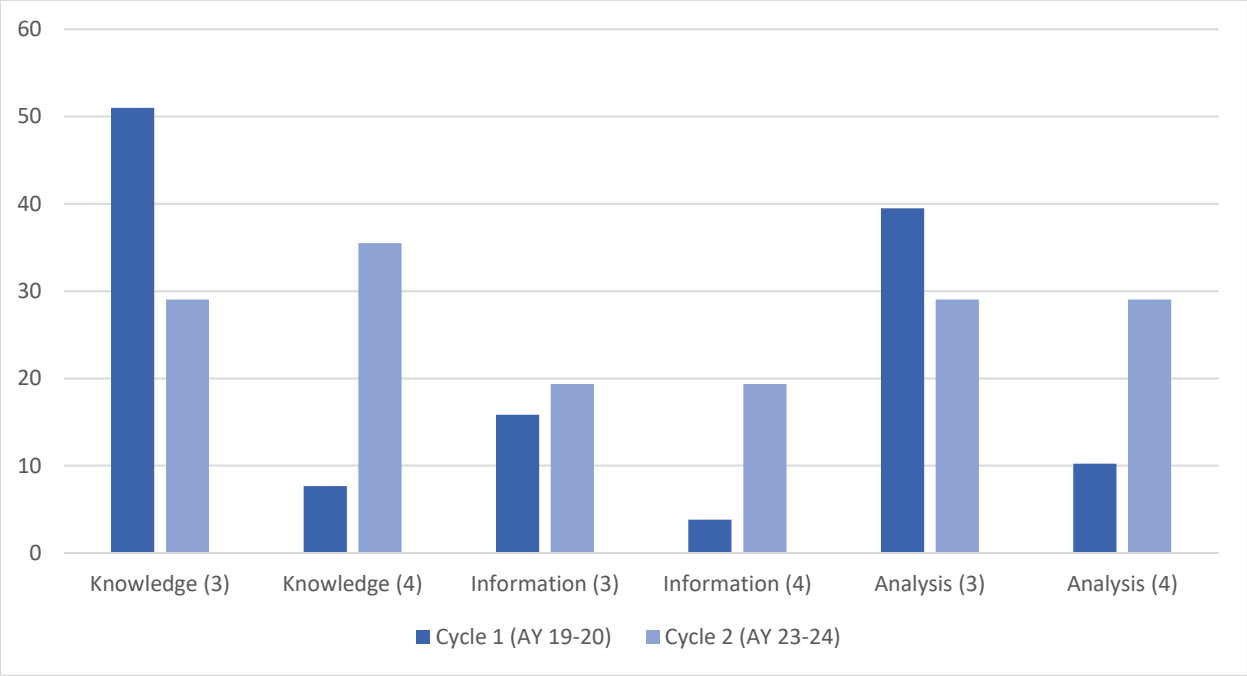
First, it is important to note the lack of artifacts for upper level Goal A courses. Even though there are ample courses in this category, and all courses were asked to submit artifacts, we received so few that at the end of our scoring period we only had 31 usable scores. This small of a sample size makes any interpretation of the data dubious.

Regardless, at all outcomes, the most notable trend is the vast improvement in percentage of "Exemplary" scores from the previous cycle of assessment. Even though we had low numbers of artifacts at the upper division, the artifacts scored demonstrated "Exemplary" performances at much higher rates than the previous cycle. Although one sees a drop in percentage of students scoring a "3" in most outcomes, this is offset by a significant increase in students scoring a "4." In addition, if one takes the upper division student experience to demonstrate acumen at point of matriculation, it is reassuring to note that, according to these data, well over 50% of students scored at "Accomplished" or higher, except for the "Information" outcome. The table below provides the relevant percentages. Using the tables and charts below one can see what percentage of student artifacts were scored as "3" and "4" for both the previous cycle and the current one.

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**N/A**	**(3 + 4)**	**Total**	**% at (3+4)**	**% at 4**
Knowledge	2	7	9	11	2	20	31	64.51	35.48
Information	6	10	6	6	3	12	31	38.7	19.35
Analysis	1	1	9	9	11	18	31	58.06	29.03

Percent of Scores at Accomplished and Exemplary Levels by Assessment Cycle Year

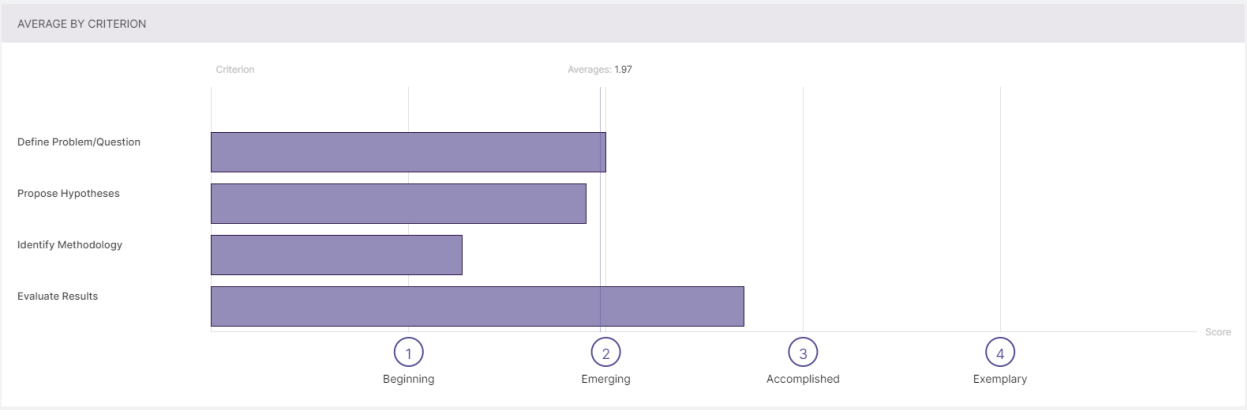
Outcome (Score)	**Cycle 1 (AY 19-20)**	**Cycle 2 (AY 23-24)**
Knowledge (3)	51.02	29.03
Knowledge (4)	7.65	35.48
Information (3)	15.85	19.35
Information (4)	3.82	19.35
Analysis (3)	39.49	29.03
Analysis (4)	10.25	29.03



Although the data is suspect, given the small sample size at the upper level, it is reassuring that our students are scoring at the higher end of the rubric (3 and 4) near the point of matriculation. If our curriculum is designed to develop, reinforce, and assist students in mastering fundamental academic skills, then in terms of critical inquiry (analysis) we are serving our students well.

Goal B (Scientific)

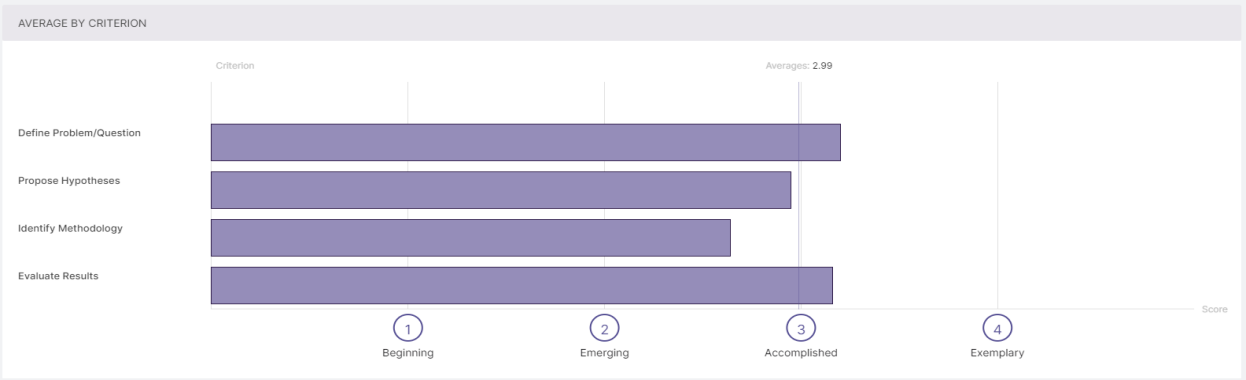
Lower Division Average by Criterion



Outcome	Average
Define Problem/Question	2.0
Propose Hypothesis	1.9
Identify Methodology	1.27
Evaluate Results	2.7

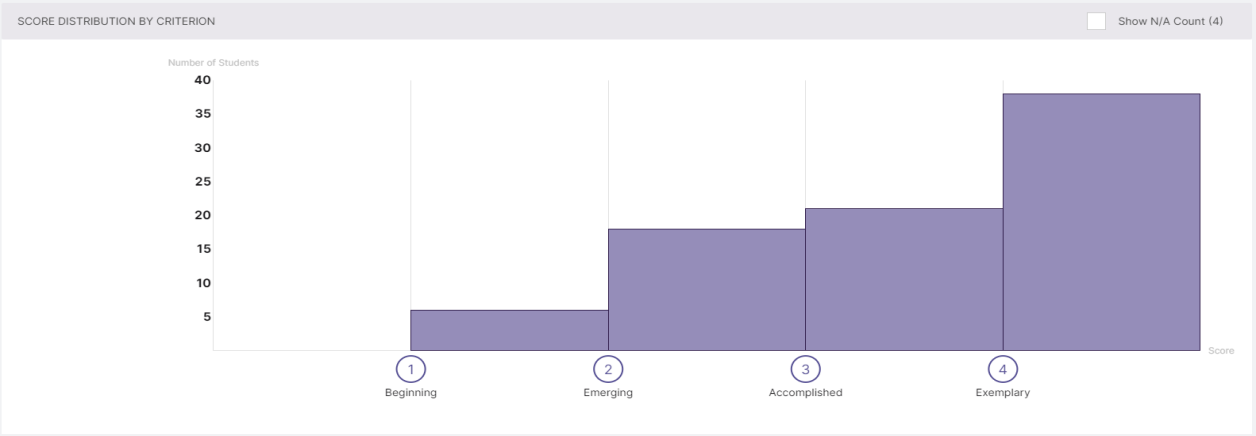
	1	2	3	4	N/A	Total	Average
Define Problem/Question	186	432	103	9	50	780	2.0
Propose Hypothesis	160	421	53	0	145	779	1.9
Identify Methodology	562	120	22	0	76	780	1.27
Evaluate Results	3	47	32	17	681	780	2.7

Upper Division Average by Criterion



Outcome	Average
Define Problem/Question	3.20
Propose Hypothesis	2.95
Identify Methodology	2.64
Evaluate Results	3.16

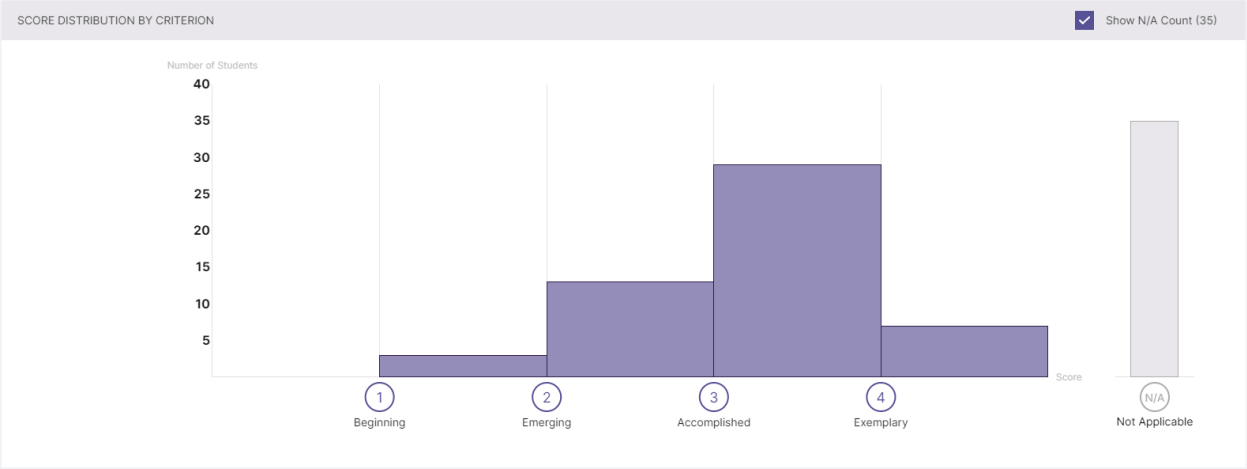
SLO 1: Define Problem/Question: A statement or summary that identifies a problem or raises a question that is relevant to the topic or assignment, appropriate to the discipline, and open to empirical inquiry (i.e., objective observation).



n=87

Rubric Score	1	2	3	4	N/A
# of scores	6	18	21	38	4

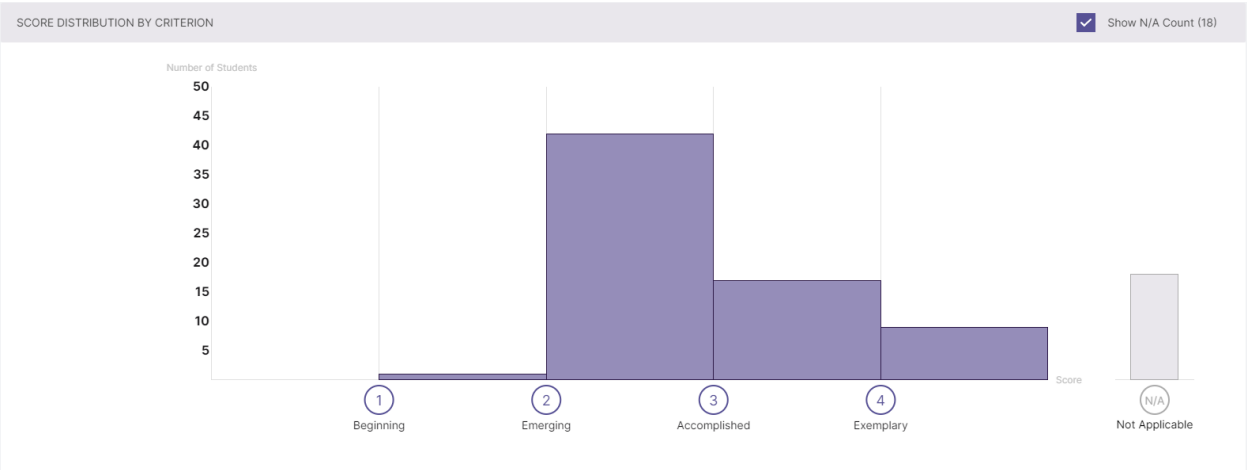
SLO 2: Propose Hypothesis: Formulating testable propositions that follow from one particular solution/answer to the problem/question.



n=87

Rubric Score	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**N/A**
# of scores	3	13	29	7	35

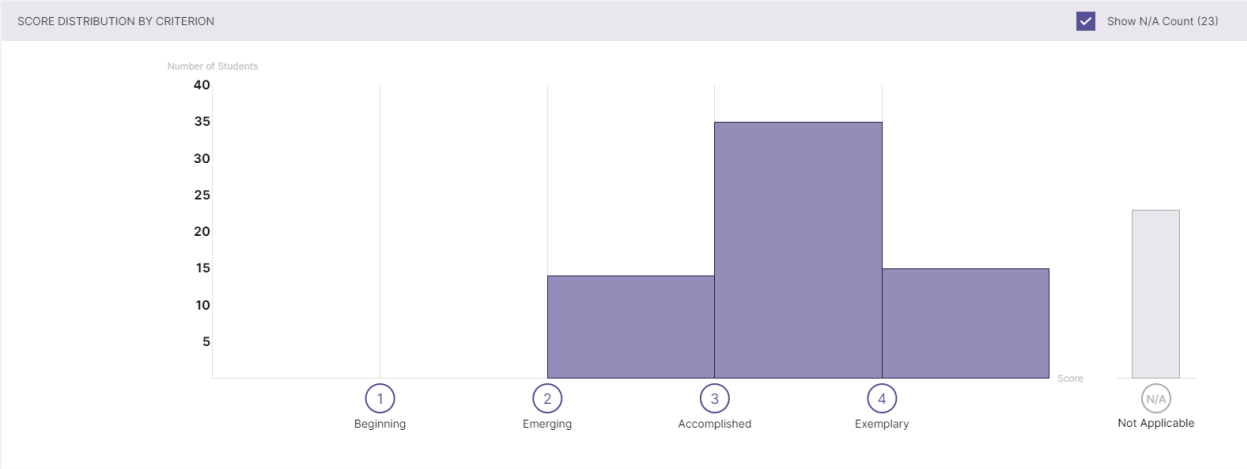
SLO 3: Identify Methodology : Selecting the appropriate set of procedures to test the hypotheses.



n=87

Rubric Score	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**N/A**
# of scores	1	42	17	9	18

SLO 4: Evaluate Results : An objective assessment of the hypotheses based on the empirical evidence gathered from the methodology.



n=87

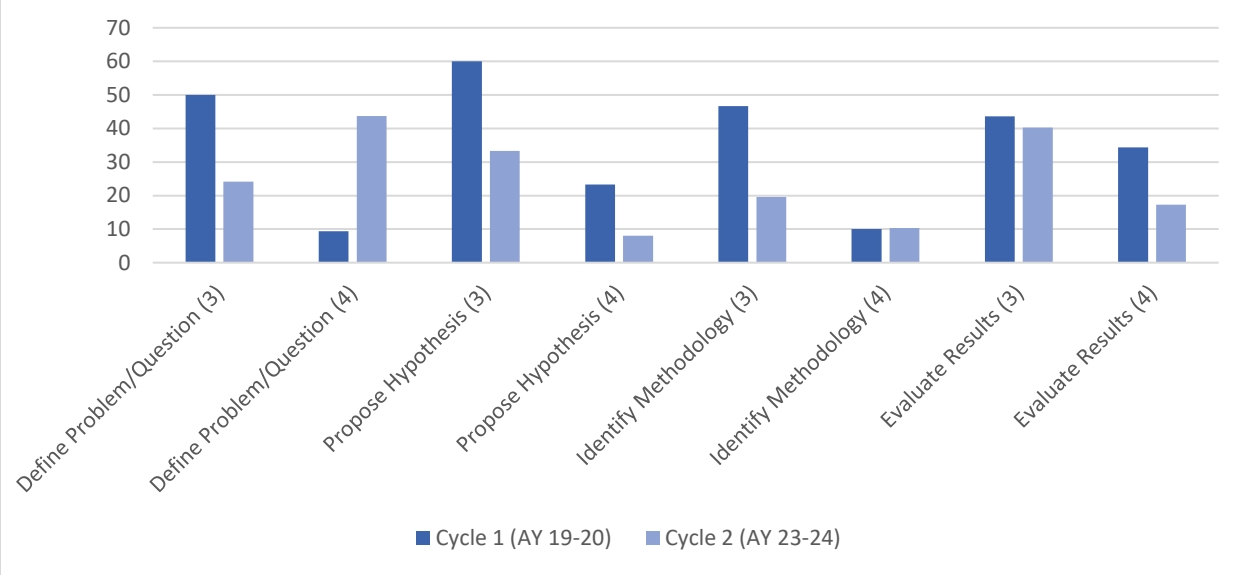
Rubric Score	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**N/A**
# of scores	0	14	35	15	23

At the upper level we see a surprising amount of “not applicable” scores. Although at the lower level we saw a similar trend, that could be accounted for by lower expectations for introductory students. That same explanation can’t account for the trend at the upper level since expectations of juniors and seniors should be higher. We should expect students at this level to be able to perform as scientists, that is, proposing hypotheses to account for observations and evaluating results of independently designed and run experiments wherein they determine what methodology is best to pursue their line of inquiry. However, we see again that the artifacts provided don’t allow them to so perform. This could be an assignment choice issue, wherein students are able to so perform, and perhaps do so in other aspects of their coursework, but the artifact provided simply didn’t afford the opportunity to demonstrate these skills. Regardless, it is worrisome that so many artifacts are so designated as it creates a lacuna in the data that may be indicative of a weakness in our curriculum. In addition, the scores we do have demonstrate that when it comes to the SLOs “Propose Hypothesis,” “Identify Methodology,” and “Evaluate Results,” students perform lower than in past cycles, and less than 1/5 of our matriculating students demonstrate “Exemplary” level performances.

	1	2	3	4	N/A	(3 + 4)	Total	% at (3+4)	% at 4
Define Problem/Question	6	18	21	38	4	59	87	67.82	43.68
Propose Hypothesis	3	13	29	7	35	36	87	41.38	8.05
Identify Methodology	1	42	17	9	18	26	87	29.89	10.34
Evaluate Results	0	14	35	15	23	50	87	57.47	17.24

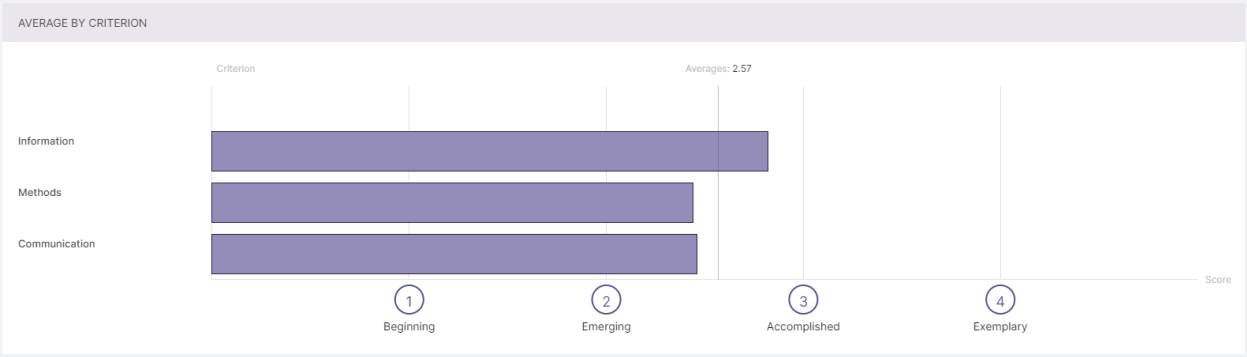
Percent of Scores at Accomplished and Exemplary Levels by Assessment Cycle Year

Outcome (Score)	Cycle 1 (AY 19-20)	Cycle 2 (AY 23-24)
Define Problem/Question (3)	50	24.14
Define Problem/Question (4)	9.38	43.68
Propose Hypothesis (3)	60	33.33
Propose Hypothesis (4)	23.33	8.05
Identify Methodology (3)	46.67	19.54
Identify Methodology (4)	10	10.34
Evaluate Results (3)	43.57	40.23
Evaluate Results (4)	34.38	17.24



Goal C (Quantitative)

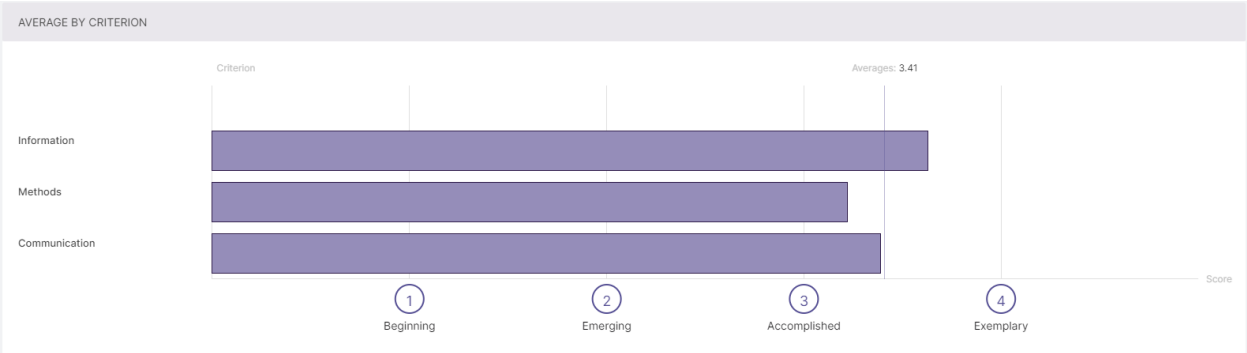
Lower Division Average by Criterion



Outcome	Average
Information	2.82
Methods	2.44
Communication	2.46

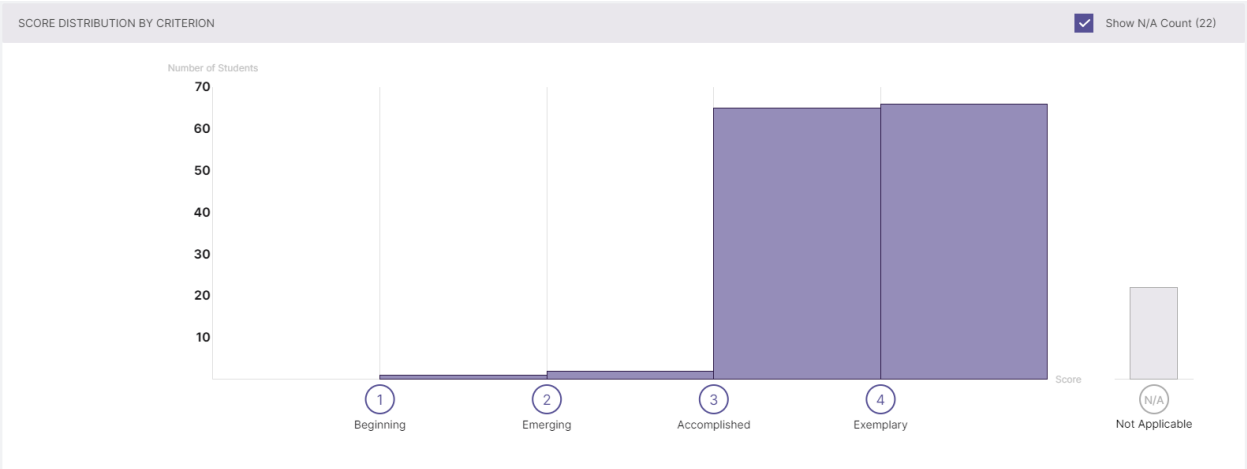
	1	2	3	4	N/A	Total	Average
Information	35	149	616	0	5	800	2.82
Methods	159	280	347	4	15	790	2.44
Communication	113	291	330	8	64	806	2.46

Upper Division Distribution by Criterion



Outcome	Average
Information	3.63
Methods	3.22
Communication	3.39

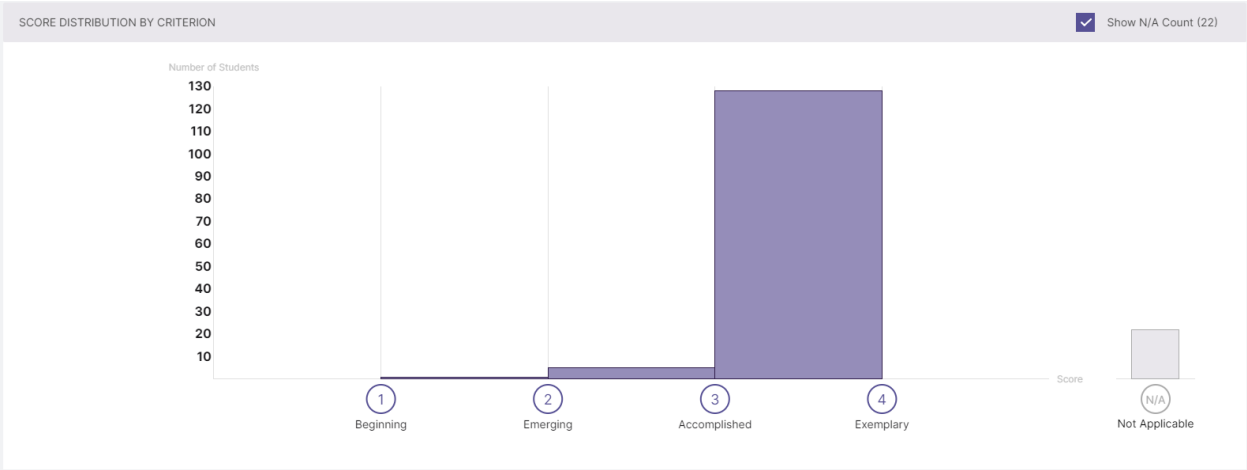
SLO 1: Information: Identifying and extracting relevant information needed to solve the problem.



n=156

Rubric Score	1	2	3	4	N/A
# of scores	1	2	65	66	22

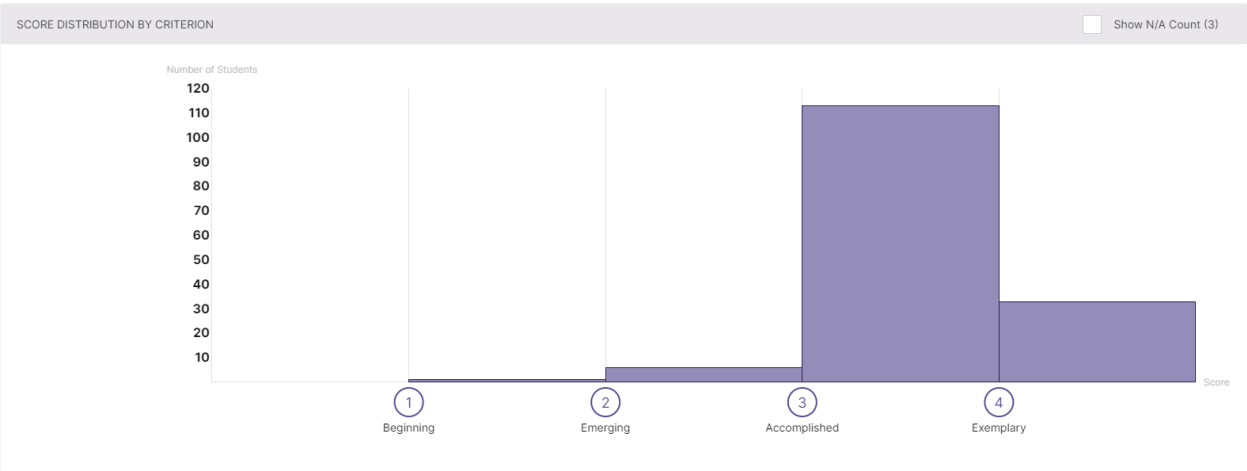
SLO 2: Methods: Selecting the appropriate methods to solve the problem.



n=156

Rubric Score	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**N/A**
# of scores	1	5	128	0	22

SLO 3: Communication: Effectively communicating quantitative concepts or evidence consistent with the purpose of the assignment.



n=156

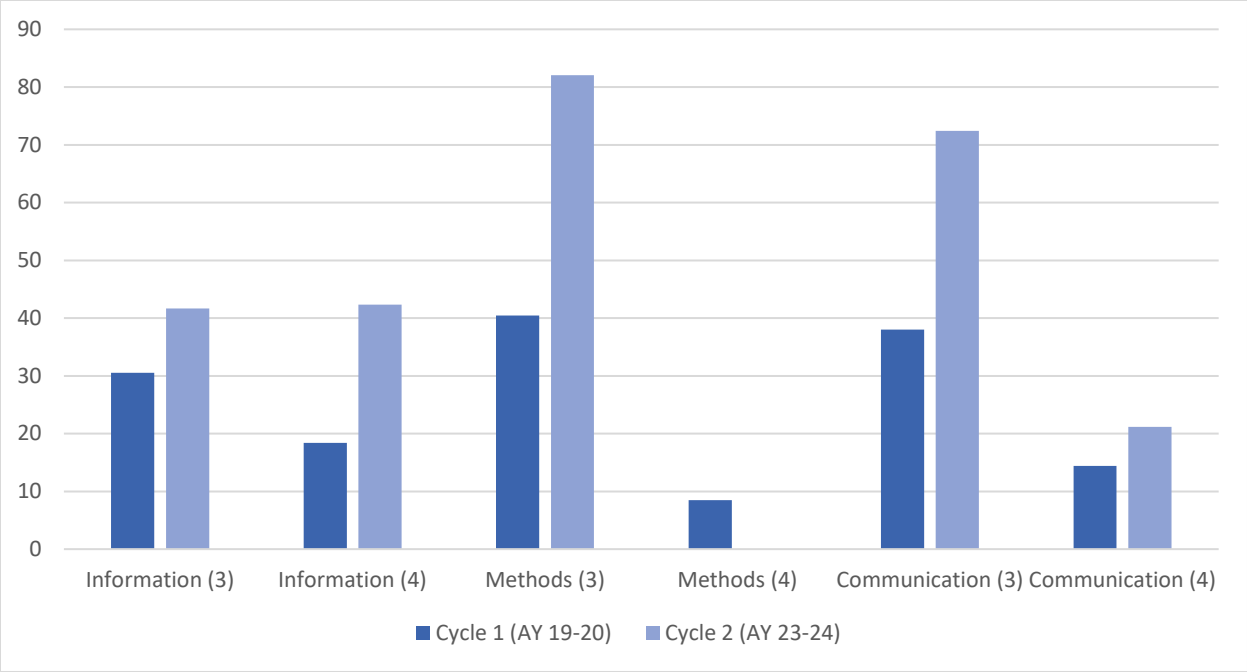
Rubric Score	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**N/A**
# of scores	1	6	113	33	3

At the upper level we again see some “not applicable” scores as we had seen in goal B, but not enough to be worrisome. What is noticeable is the lack of “Exemplary” scores in both SLO 2 (Methods) and SLO 3 (Communication). There were no artifacts scored at 4 “Exemplary” for “Methods” which is worrisome. The options are that 1) assignments didn’t allow for a response that would result in a score of 4 or 2) assignments did so but no student scored a 4. This is only demonstrative for these artifacts, but the lack of a single score of 4 among 156 possible scores indicates a weakness in the curriculum, either assignment design and choice, or in student expectations and acumen.

	1	2	3	4	N/A	(3 + 4)	Total	% at (3+4)	% at 4
Information	1	2	65	66	22	131	156	83.97	42.31
Methods	1	5	128	0	22	128	156	82.05	0
Communication	1	6	113	33	3	146	156	93.59	21.15

Percent of Scores at Accomplished and Exemplary Levels by Assessment Cycle Year

Outcome (Score)	Cycle 1 (AY 19-20)	Cycle 2 (AY 23-24)
Information (3)	30.51	41.67
Information (4)	18.38	42.31
Methods (3)	40.44	82.05
Methods (4)	8.46	0
Communication (3)	38.01	72.44
Communication (4)	14.39	21.15



In conclusion, although scores improved on the whole, the lack of any scores of 4 at Methods, in addition to low levels of scores of 4 in the previous cycle, suggests that either assignments aren't well designed to prompt and so facilitate exemplary level performances, or our students are not prepared to so offer exemplary responses. There is work to be done in this area.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, compliance continues to be an issue. We receive far too few artifacts from far too selective a set of courses from which to generate a stratified, random sample. For example, almost all the artifacts for Goal B came from Biology, whereas Chemistry, Physics, and Geography have sizeable shares of courses in that area. Having a limited, and skewed, sample from which to draw makes the assessment numbers unreliable. They cannot reasonably be generalized to the curriculum as a whole, even if they do indicate certain trends, cautiously interpreted.

From the data received it is clear that assignment design and selection are issues that could improve the quality of artifacts received. As noted above, there were a significant number of artifacts denoted "not scoreable" indicating that the assignment provided was a flawed instrument in measuring student acumen across the outcomes of the goal. Work with departments, CETAL, and others to improve not just faculty involvement and participation, but quality of assignment design is needed.

Interpreting the data cautiously, we can say that those artifacts evaluated indicated that at the lower level student are being provided a firm foundation in these fundamental skills across the entire Critical Inquiry competency. At the upper level, there is clear work to be done, and not nearly enough of our students are scoring “Accomplished” or “Exemplary” at the end of their general education curriculum. Insofar as the rationale for the Core curriculum is the provision of this foundational education, and our students do not, overall, excel across these outcomes well into their college curriculum, there is work to be done. Whether that is curriculum development, or a full scale audit and re-evaluation of all courses at the upper division, as was recently competed for the lower division, we will wait until the completion of the 10 year review to recommend.

III. Curriculum

The UCA Core curriculum is guided by the UCA Core Council. The Council is charged to review the current UCA Core program and make appropriate recommendations to the Council of Deans; to review and recommend to the Council of Deans new and revised UCA Core curricula proposed by the various departments and colleges; and to initiate and recommend policies and procedures relevant to UCA Core requirements. Given that the UCA Core Council oversees the UCA Core curriculum it is incumbent on the UCA Core Council to: 1) articulate a clear vision of the UCA Core as a cohesive program of study; 2) determine and apply rigorous standards for all courses included in the UCA Core curriculum consistent with the goals of the UCA Core; 3) oversee assessment of the program to guarantee that the goals of the UCA Core are met by the Core curriculum.

The Core Council is comprised of:

- One department chair is elected from each of the academic colleges.
- Two faculty members elected from each academic college with at least one holding the rank of assistant professor or above;
- One faculty member elected by the Schedler Honors College faculty.
- Two students are invited to serve as members of the council, one representing the Student Government Association and one representing Alpha Chi.
- The Assistant Provost for Academic Assessment and General Education serves as chair of the Council.
- The associate provost as designated by the provost, director of the library and the registrar are ex-officio, non-voting members.

Each council member serves three years on a rotating basis. Students serve one-year terms.

As part of its regular duties, the UCA Core Council reviews all proposals to add courses to or remove courses from the UCA Core Curriculum. Proposals are reviewed based on course content and fitness, as well as with respect to UCA Core curricular needs. It is the UCA Core Council's responsibility to evaluate proposed as well as extant courses in relation to their commitment to offer experiences consistent with purpose and mission of the UCA Core.

Liberal education has always been understood as a set of outcomes desirous for a well-rounded and developed human being. In modern times these outcomes have been defined and defended under the argument that they foment the development of students into functioning citizens of character. From the trivium and quadrivium to today this has been true, regardless of whether how these outcomes were manifest or delivered have changed. Having clearly articulated outcomes, as does the UCA Core, alleviates the difficulty of explaining the content, and thus justifying the relevance of, UCA's general education program. Having clearly articulated outcomes also affords UCA to both assess the program and promote and reinforce curricular coherence. In addition, since the curriculum is governed by the Core Council, a representative body of all UCA faculty, it is the faculty, through their representatives that monitor, assess, revise, and deliver the general education curriculum at UCA. This is a crucial component to UCA's general education program. As one scholar notes, "…how curricula are developed and how educators execute these courses matter."10 Having faculty involved in the development, provision, assessment, evaluation, and revision of the general education curriculum is crucial to its coherence, rigor, and ultimately its success. The fact that at UCA we regularly convene to discuss the aims of our general education program and the structure of our curriculum, as well as the fact that we focus on outcomes and use this information to inform curricular design brings UCA in line with best practices in terms of the development and delivery of our general education program.

Ultimately, the UCA Core, as a curriculum, is developed and implemented using what might be termed a Federalist Model. With strong university standards articulated in the UCA Core handbook, and courses approved into the curriculum via a representative legislative body, it is up to the individual departments to offer these courses in line with university standards, and in this regard, they have a great deal of latitude. When courses are reviewed for consistency and rigor according to the Core standards each course is adjudicated by a sub-committee of the Core Council according to these standards. Thus, there is oversight assuring consistency and quality, while recognizing the autonomy of instructors, departments, and colleges in terms of how the general education program is delivered within their respective areas. This is a collaborative effort and thus requires participation from all involved as well as a shared understanding and appreciation of shared expectations and values.

The Curriculum Review Process

The UCA Core Council, as per its charge, reviews all proposals to add course to or remove courses from the UCA Core Curriculum. Proposals are reviewed based on course content and fitness, as well as with respect to Core curricular needs.

In order to add a course the Lower Division (LD) Core the petitioning program must demonstrate that the proposed course meets the standards of the potential area of the LD Core. If the program believes it can demonstrate fitness, the process for adding a course to the LD Core is as follows:

1. If the course being proposed is a new course complete Curriculum Form U1. If the course being proposed is an existing course complete Curriculum Form U2-A. All forms may be located here: http://uca.edu/panda/curriculum-development-process-guide/cdpg-forms/.
2. Complete and attach to U1 or U2-A, Curriculum Attachment A (Proposal to Add a Course to the UCA Core).
3. NB: The UCA Core council will need sufficient evidence to evaluate the fitness of the proposed course as a formative experience in the competency area and for the goal(s) for which the course is being proposed.

In order to add a course to the Upper Division (UD) Core the petitioning program must demonstrate that the proposed course meets the standards of the potential area of the UD Core. If the program believes it can demonstrate fitness, the process for adding a course to the UD Core is as follows:

1. If the course being proposed is a new course complete Curriculum Form U1. If the course being proposed is an existing course complete Curriculum Form U2-A. All forms may be located here: http://uca.edu/panda/curriculum-development-process-guide/cdpg-forms/.
2. Complete and attach to U1 or U2-A, Curriculum Attachment A (Proposal to Add a Course to the UCA Core).
3. NB: The UCA Core council will need sufficient evidence to evaluate the fitness of the proposed course as a summative experience in the competency area and for the goal(s) for which the course is being proposed. Thus, we strongly recommend that proposals explicitly address each student learning outcome relevant to the proposal under consideration and include a detailed syllabus contextualizing the educational experiences to be offered.[8]

[8] Fully articulated standards can be found in the UCA Core Handbook at: https://uca.edu/core/for-faculty/

Oversight and Improvement

In order to ensure consistent quality across all UCA Core courses, a full review, or audit, of all courses in the lower division (LD) UCA Core was undertaken in order to assure curricular coherence among courses within the LD Core.[9] That is, every course in the LD Core was reviewed in order to assure it aligned well to the learning outcomes of the Core competency under which it was placed. All courses under a shared goal of a specific competency should align to the same learning outcomes thereby providing students with similar learning experiences regardless of course prefix/subject matter. This review was undertaken to assure the integrity of the UCA Core program, specifically the LD Core, as a coherent and rigorous academic program defined by clear goals and well-articulated learning outcomes.

The initial design of the LD Core took courses from the extant general education program and, through an expedited review process, re-aligned them under the newly adopted structure. In order to transition from the previous general education program to the new UCA Core all courses were reviewed through this process. New courses were also proposed to be added to the UCA Core. The review was conducted by the general education council. Initially, in order for a course to be placed under a competency it had to designate which learning outcomes it would address, and the counsel would then adjudge the merit of the course. (Goals were redefined shortly after the initial, expedited review, which led to some misalignment between courses and the competency area under which they were first designated.) The expedited process allowed for a quick transition from the previous general education program to the new UCA Core. However, given the expedited nature of the review process, the vague definitions of the newly developed learning outcomes, as well as external pressures, the LD Core failed to achieve curricular coherence.

In addition, ACT 747 put pressure on UCA to revise its general education policy in order to assure that all, or most, of UCA's programs were within the 120 credit hours for degree programs required by the policy. Previously, courses in the general education program could not count toward students' major requirements. With the state requirement that degree programs limit themselves to 120 credit hours, many majors had to find ways to streamline requirements. Where accreditors were inflexible, UCA had to give. UCA revised its policy to allow general education courses to count towards major and minor requirements, thus allowing students to meet general education requirements and major requirements simultaneously, making the 120 credit hour requirement feasible. To accomplish this, many courses that

[9] See the full audit report "UCA Core Lower Division Course Review (2022)" here: https://uca.edu/core/assessment/

had not previously counted as general education needed to find a way into the general education curriculum. An outcomes based general education program allowed them to make the case that they could meet the criteria. For example, Nutrition 1300 could make the case that it met the learning outcomes of Responsible Living, allowing Nursing students to meet general education requirements while taking courses required for the major. Many areas made similar moves. Thus, the general education program quickly expanded and began to include many courses from areas not traditionally recognized as part of a general education. This caused a great deal of consternation from the traditional providers of general education on campus – primarily the liberal and fine arts - who predicted their market share of undergraduate students would shrink as new areas moved in to meet demand. Thus, the UCA Core, specifically the LD Core, faced two problems: 1) Were the courses in the LD Core well-aligned to the newly adopted and articulated UCA Core competencies, goals, and outcomes, and 2) Did campus perceive the UCA Core to be an intentional curriculum.

The UCA Core curriculum is guided by the UCA Core Council. The Council is charged to review the UCA Core program and make recommendations to the Council of Deans; to review and recommend to the Council of Deans new and revised UCA Core curricula proposed by the various departments and colleges; and to initiate and recommend policies and procedures relevant to UCA Core requirements. Given that the UCA Core Council oversees the UCA Core curriculum it is incumbent on the UCA Core Council to: 1) articulate a clear vision of the UCA Core as a cohesive program of study; 2) determine and apply rigorous standards for all courses included in the UCA Core curriculum consistent with the goals of the UCA Core; 3) oversee assessment of the program to guarantee that the goals of the UCA Core are being met by the Core curriculum.

In addition, since the Core curriculum is governed by the Core Council, a representative body of all UCA faculty, it is the faculty, through their representatives, that monitor, assess, and revise the general education curriculum at UCA. This is a crucial component to UCA's general education program. Having faculty involved in the development, assessment, and revision of the general education curriculum is crucial to its success. As noted above, the UCA Core, as a curriculum, is developed and implemented using what might be termed a federalist model.[10] With strong university standards articulated in the UCA Core handbook, and courses approved into the curriculum via a representative legislative body, it is

[10] See "A Federalist Model of General Education Assessment and Improvement" located at: https://uca.edu/core/assessment/

up to the individual departments to offer these courses in line with university standards, and in this regard they have a great deal of latitude. Yet oversight is crucial.

As the UCA Core Council began to develop and implement the assessment plan for the UCA Core[11], and as departments continued to propose additions to the LD Core, it became clear that the courses in the LD Core needed to be reviewed to assure that they were well-aligned to the learning outcomes of the goal for the competency under which they were placed. In the spring of 2018, at the May 1st meeting of the UCA Core Council,[12] the Council voted unanimously to place a moratorium on all additions to the LD Core and begin a laborious four year review of all courses in the LD Core.

The review process mirrored the assessment cycle of the UCA Core, beginning with Responsible Living, moving through Diversity and Effective Communication, and ending with Critical Inquiry. Each academic year, the assessment sub-committee of the UCA Core Council was charged with reviewing all courses in one competency area. The sub-committee was constituted by a representative from each college as well as a student representative. The chair of the sub-committee, Dr. Held, contacted all the programs that offered courses under a competency and requested materials from all extant sections of that class. The sub-committee reviewed all the materials. The committee used the guidelines for admittance to the LD Core as found in the UCA Core Handbook. Once the materials were reviewed the committee made a recommendation to the Core Council, either to accept the course as well-aligned, or to deem it not well-aligned. If a course was determined to be well-aligned the department was notified and no further action was necessary. If the course was deemed not well-aligned, the Core Council would request an assurance argument from the department. An assurance argument consisted of a stated commitment to the Core outcomes under which the course was designated as well as proof that the course was being redesigned to address all of the committee's concerns, for example, redesigning assignments, adding new readings, etc. If a department did not desire to redesign a course, they could opt to remove it from that category of the LD Core. Once the assurance argument was received it was reviewed by the curriculum review sub-committee of the UCA Core Council as if it were a new course being proposed to be added to the LD Core. The curriculum review sub-committee would make a recommendation to the Core Council, the full Council would vote and the matter would be resolved. In this way, every course in

[11] For a comprehensive history of the development and implementation of the UCA Core in its first four years see: "UCA Core Program Review (First 4-Year Cycle Report, 2016-2020)" located at: https://uca.edu/core/assessment/
[12] UCA Core Council Minutes can be accessed at: https://uca.edu/core/minutes/

the LD Core was reviewed, culminating in an LD Core that has been thoroughly, rigorously vetted. Below are the basic details of each review period.

1) The majority of courses were well-aligned when initially reviewed.
    a. Under Responsible Living **17 of 24** courses were initially determined to be well-aligned.
    b. Under Diversity, **22 of 32** courses were initially determined to be well-aligned.
    c. Under Effective Communication, **7 of 8** courses were initially determined to be well-aligned.
    d. Under Critical Inquiry, **50 of 51** courses were initially determined to be well-aligned.
2) Constructive working relationships with chairs and departments were developed and enriched, leading to productive dialogues regarding the development of the LD Core curriculum.
3) At the conclusion of the 4-year, LD Core review: All courses, regardless of prefix, are well-aligned to the UCA Core outcomes for the goal of the competency under which they are placed. Thus, all LD Core courses offer students rigorous engagements with the learning outcomes under the competency area in which they are placed.
4) With the LD Core fully reviewed, the moratorium on additions to the LD Core was removed.

One of the main challenges that has become apparent is the lack of intentional or regimented scaffolding throughout the UCA Core curriculum. Even though the program is designed to introduce outcomes at the lower division and later reinforce those same outcomes at the upper division, there is no requirement or way to insure that students in fact take lower division and upper division courses in sequence, or even when they do, that they take the same goal at both the upper and lower divisions. Thus, for example, a student may take Goal A of responsible living at the lower division and a course classified under Goal B at the upper division. Since the outcomes under goal A and B differ, they cannot build upon each other, and so what is designed to be a structured and scaffolded learning experience becomes disjointed. This is an issue a solution for which is not readily available, as the logistics of requiring a more rigorously scaffolded program seem impracticable. However, one solution may be to simply reduce the number of goals under the various competency areas where possible, such as under responsible living and diversity. Then, the outcomes would be identical at the lower and upper levels regardless of course choice. If outcomes could be authored that all relevant stakeholders were amenable to, this would be a workable solution to the scaffolding problem.

Recently, in an attempt to streamline our general education requirements, more closely aligning them to the state minimum core, thus facilitating greater efficiency in evaluating transfer credit, we have adopted some significant revisions to the Core curriculum. First, we changed our fine arts and humanities requirement to accept 6 credit hours of any courses designated fine arts or humanities instead of requiring students to take 3 hours of a course designated fine arts and 3 hours of a course designated humanities. In a similar move, we also changed our laboratory science requirement such that students are now required to take 8 hours of lab sciences, regardless of prefix, whereas previously they were required to take 4 hours of a lab science designated life science and 4 hours from a lab science designated physical science. These moves allow greater flexibility to students at UCA, as well as transfer students, without diluting the demand for a broad liberal education or academic rigor.

First Year Seminars

First-Year Seminars (FYS) are identified as high impact practices (HIP), but as with any HIP, regardless of what anecdotal or other data indicate, a practice is only high impact, that is, foments retention and persistence and in general promotes student success, if done well. Conversely, if done well most educational experiences are high impact. Herein lies the problem with the practice of FYS as a high impact practice at UCA. Although initially recommended by the General Education Taskforce as a HIP, from their inception FYSes struggled to create an identity for themselves and thus struggled to be high impact practices for first year students. First-year seminars were adopted with no clear telos or purpose, even though broad guidelines were offered to define them. Class limits were set at 25 students, instruction in the importance and structure of general education at UCA was mandated as part of the curriculum, and these courses were assessed for written communication, collaboration, and one other Core goal depending on course content. But beyond these broad guidelines little was done to define these seminars as unique educational experiences or to intentionally design them to assist first year students as transitional students.

FYS courses, according to the UCA Core handbook are defined as: First-year seminar (FYS) courses provide an intimate educational experience, integrating knowledge and skills within an academic discipline with Core competencies, and connecting students to UCA. A variety of courses can be used for the first-year seminar.

FYS courses were designed to address Effective Communication outcomes, including written communication and collaboration, as well as either a Critical Inquiry, Diversity, or Responsible Living outcome. FYS courses were distinguished by their placement in the lower division Core. FYS courses were to be introductions to the university experience providing a seminar style, intensive educational experience as well as opportunities to connect to UCA. First-Year Seminar courses were to provide a highly interactive, small-class learning environment for first-year students. In addition, these courses were to offer support for the unique needs of first-year students, providing discussions about issues such as effective study skills and exam preparation as well as orientation information about the services UCA provides to support students. FYS instructors were provided with faculty development opportunities to address the unique needs of first year students.

The problems with implementation were numerous, including: 1) students enrolling in FYS courses were not necessarily first year students, creating problems for faculty in designing and delivering a curriculum for first year students. 2) Students were not required to take an FYS in their first semester at UCA, thus diminishing the impact of an FYS as a transitional course. 3) There was no unified or shared curriculum in FYS courses thus failing to offer students a consistent experience across sections. 4) Faculty who offered FYS courses were not necessarily trained in pedagogy for transitional students. These issues resulted in the general consequence that FYS courses were not in practice seminar style courses for first year students rooted in best practices for transitional students offering preparation for college success and connective, engaging experiences for first year students at UCA. Several attempts had been made to remedy the situation.

Over the course of several years, then Director of the UCA Core, Dr. Held, compiled and disseminated an FYS handbook to all faculty teaching FYS courses, as well as posting the handbook and related materials on-line. The handbook consisted of both an overview of the intent and structure of FYS courses, and emphasized the need for transitional student experiences, which had not been addressed in the initial FYS proposal put forward by the taskforce. Held also included exercises, materials, resources, and even a sample syllabus demonstrating how to integrate these materials into an FYS course. This was the first effort to try and systematize FYS course content and create a shared experience among FYS students.

Dr. Held, in coordination with the Office of the Provost and the UCA Core Council, attempted to revise the FYS requirement. The extant requirement requires that all first year students take an FYS course, which exempts any student coming into UCA with 30 or more credits. However, given the prevalence of AP, IP, and concurrent/dual enrollment credits, many first time, full time degree seeking students are

not by credit hour first year students. They were thus unable to take an FYS course even though they are new to campus and thus face the same challenges students with 0-29 credit hours face. A new requirement was crafted and passed the UCA Core Council but was unable to pass through the Council of Deans.

Third, working closely with Dr. Thomas Bruick, Mapworks, a student success and early reporting software package, was promoted through the FYS courses and instructors were encouraged to use the reports from Mapworks to tailor course experiences to their students' needs. In connection with Mapworks, Dr. Bruick and Dr. Held developed, (with assistance from Dr. Gary Bunn and Dr. Julia Winden-Fey) an FYS student mentor program using a similar program at the University of Northern Iowa as a model. A pilot program was developed in AY16-17 and continued for one subsequent year, AY 17-18. Sophomore students were interviewed and selected to be peer mentors in selected FYS courses. The peer mentors took a course (EDUC 2310: Studies in Leadership Concepts), learned about student success, and then facilitated discussions in their sections to assist first year students in a more hands on, one on one manner than faculty were prepared or comfortable doing. The peer mentor program allowed us to integrate student success measures into FYS sections without affecting faculty curriculum. At the same time, as a curricular matter, Dr. Held began promoting "shell" courses, or general topic FYS courses, for example "FYS in Responsible Living," so that faculty could create boutique, or true seminar style courses under this heading. These efforts together worked to create a true seminar style course with integrated success materials as well as mentoring. Unfortunately, faculty buy-in was lacking with respect to shell courses, and chairs were recalcitrant to offer more FYS courses citing concerns over student credit hour production. Ultimately, although successful, as indicated by both survey data from mentors and faculty that participated, as well as data provided by the Office of Institutional Research, the diminishing returns of the effort needed to continue the program resulted in the decision to put the program on hold.

Fourth, Dr. Held developed, in coordination with Dr. Amy Hawkins and the Center for Teaching Excellence, now the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Leadership (CETAL), a Recognition Track for Excellence in Teaching First Year Students. This track offered faculty who teach First Year students an opportunity to learn about best practices in dealing with and supporting this population. Over the years this track was one of the most successful recognition tracks in the CTE. In fact, it was so successful that Dr. Hawkins created a weeklong boot camp or mini conference in the summer organized around teaching first year students. Yet, these were *ad hoc* solutions to structural problems.

In the UCA Core Council's 2019 FYS Sub-Committee Report and Recommendation,[13] the sub-committee concluded that FYS courses have failed to develop a clear identity. These courses, originally designed to be small, seminar style courses that incidentally informed students about the UCA Core as a coherent general education curriculum, to date still lack cohesion. There is no clear set of learning outcomes and no uniform curriculum or shared set of expectations or goals between sections. The sub-committee further envisioned that "the purpose of an FYS course at UCA is to provide students with an exemplary academic experience as an introduction to collegiate life at UCA." To achieve its purpose, the sub-committee articulated five goals of an FYS course: (1) promote academic writing skills, (2) promote collaboration skills, (3) promote one of the UCA Core outcomes by means of disciplinary content, (4) promote a connection/relationship with the university, and (5) introduce students to college-level expectations, as well as strategies for meeting those expectations. To ensure success in achieving the goals, the sub-committee recommended that sections be limited to 20 students, that all faculty teaching FYS be trained as FYS instructors through CETAL, and all FYS sections be taught by full-time faculty in the discipline.

While the UCA Core Council sub-committee's report clearly identified a need for a cohesive and consistent FYS program that achieved its stated purpose, it fell short of detailing the specific learning objectives, course design principles, and organizational implementation needed to do so. Because FYS courses are recognized as a high-impact practice, the Council for Student Success charged its High-Impact Practices (HIPs) Working Group to (re)design the FYS course at UCA in line with the recommendations of the UCA Core Council and national best practices. The working group developed a set of learning objectives that addressed the following four overarching questions integral to providing students the "exemplary academic experience" that will prepare them to be a successful college student at UCA[14]:

1. What is academic knowledge?

2. How will you succeed in college?

3. How do we work together?

4. How do we create knowledge?

[13] Full report available upon request.
[14] Full proposal available upon request.

To achieve those objectives, the working group recommended that FYS courses "be built around a set of core principles that provide structure and consistency, but allow faculty the freedom to design a creative and innovative academic experience." The core design principles recommended by the group were:

- Introduce students to ways of knowing, academic standards, and scholarly debates of an academic field through exploration of a special topic, centering global perspectives and traditionally marginalized voices
- Use assignment structures and pedagogical strategies that help students develop the skills needed to meet the academic expectations of college, such as labor-based contract grading, formative assessment, and scaffolded assignments
- Guide students in recognizing and using academic success skills such as academic reading, effective studying, and time management
- Integrate the use of university resources into required assignments and available course materials, and provide opportunities to identify how resources support students from different backgrounds and during specific circumstances
- Create intentional and extended opportunities for peer collaboration and support, such as writing or research groups, team project-based learning, community-based learning, and experiential learning
- Include intentional, required, and repeated opportunities for faculty-student interaction, such as individual conferences, recursive feedback and revision processes, and scaffolded assignments

Furthermore, the working group provided specific recommendations to ensure that FYS courses achieve their purpose and function as a cohesive program. These recommendations included:

- FYS courses will be designed intentionally and exclusively as FYS
- FYS course enrollment will be capped at 22 students, consistent with enrollment for first-year writing courses
- All first-time, full-time undergraduate students will be required to enroll in an FYS course in their first 30 hours at UCA

- An FYS Coordinator and FYS Advisory Committee will be established to provide ongoing support, expertise, and oversight
- FYS faculty will be trained through CETAL, with flexible faculty development options and ongoing support provided

The final proposal from the HIPs Working Group was endorsed by the CSS in 2021. The provost then sought feedback from the Faculty Senate on the proposal. In 2022, the Faculty Senate Academic Affairs subcommittee reviewed the proposal and submitted a report to the full senate. A pilot program was then developed for AY 23-24.

The deans and chairs of the departments that offered an FYS course in the 2021-2022 academic year were approached and asked if their FYS courses would participate in the FYS Reset pilot under the conditions outlined above. Specifically, they had to commit (1) to offering the course exclusively as an FYS (i.e., no non- FYS sections) and (2) to their FYS instructors participating in professional development to help them redesign the course according to the FYS learning goals and design principles. Several departments respectfully declined the request and agreed to not offer any FYS sections during the 2023-2024 academic year.

Given the positive results of the pilot, the Office of the Provost moved forward with the next phase of the FYS Reset by seeking appropriate changes to the UCA Core curriculum and policies. This proposal is organized around the recommendations of the Faculty Senate Academic Affairs subcommittee.

FYS courses will follow the learning goals and design principles set out in the proposal from the HIPs Working Group and as implemented in the pilot FYS Reset.

The purpose of the pilot FYS Reset was to demonstrate sufficient capacity to implement a robust and cohesive FYS program with existing faculty. The results of the pilot showed sufficient faculty interest and instructional capacity to go forward. The success of the pilot has also generated interest from other departments to develop and offer FYS courses. Each college and department will need to assess their capacity to offer FYS courses given existing and potential instructional resources and demands.

We thus enter a new phase of FYS courses at UCA. But we are far too early into the process to be able to evaluate its effectiveness and so whether the opportunity cost of the program is offset by positive gains in student success attributable to the structure of FYS as opposed to other confounding variables.

Capstones

Although a great deal of energy has been spent on FYS courses, and this is understandable given university administration concerns with retention and persistence, if we are focused on student success and ultimately academic integrity and excellence, we cannot ignore the Capstone learning experience. Although a capstone course is required as part of the student's upper division Core requirements, little has been done to date to evaluate the content and rigor of capstone courses, at least not on the scale of efforts towards promoting FYS courses. This is a missed opportunity. Capstones provide an opportunity for interdisciplinary learning, undergraduate research, and for students to develop and showcase their academic skills as they matriculate and enter their chosen field. Greater work needs to be done envisioning a coherent, programmatic approach to capstone courses.

IV. Academic Support

Throughout the development, implementation, and continued improvement of the UCA Core, the director of the program and the UCA Core Council have retained a productive working relationship with various support units across campus including Academic Advising, the Registrar's Office, transfer services, and those overseeing concurrent enrollment. It is through these relationships that the program is able to be continuously tailored to serve the needs of our students while offering a high quality general education program.

We recognize that at 38 hours our lower division Core requirement is 3 credit hours higher than the state minimum core, and that this additional 3 hours is in an area, responsible living, that many students may not have previous work in, whether that be in high school as they complete concurrent/dual enrollment courses, or from previous universities, in the case of transfer students. Thus, the director of the program works regularly with academic advising and transfer services to see how best to match previous earned credit with our unique general education requirements, maintaining academic rigor while removing undue burdens from students on their paths to matriculation.

For example, with respect to the relationship between the UCA Core and the state minimum core several changes have been made over time to address burdens UCA's unique general education requirements placed on students without sacrificing academic rigor. Some examples of how the program is administered to both facilitate matriculation while maintaining academic integrity include:

1) With respect to transfer students, students who enter with the state minimum core are considered LD Core complete, and thus do not have to take "additional" courses when they enter UCA.
2) We have removed our unique Fine Arts/Humanities requirement thus bringing UCA in alignment with the state minimum core and no longer requiring students to take additional Fine arts or Humanities course work for dubious reasons. This benefits both transfer students who can use more prior coursework towards UCA requirements, and UCA students who were poorly advised or otherwise confused by our requirements and thus may have had to take additional coursework.
3) Similar to point 2 above, we removed our unique laboratory sciences requirement and now, consistent with the state minimum core, accept any 8 hours of laboratory sciences.

4) The director works regularly with the registrar's office to identify fitting substitutions for UCA Core courses so students are able to have these applied automatically at intake, instead of having to request special substitutions later in their academic career.
5) The director meets regularly with academic advising staff to clarify the requirements, advise on changes in the curriculum, and advise on effective navigation of the requirements.

In addition, the director of the program has developed a strong relationship with the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Leadership (CETAL) to develop programming for faculty to assist in providing best practices in our general education programming.[15] This relationship is seen in previous programming, such as the FYS recognition track – mentioned above – but also in more recent developments such as the development of a Writing across the Curriculum (WAC/WID) program and most recently the development of a Communication across the Curriculum program aligned with UCA's Center for Writing and Communication. The assessment data for the Effective Communication competency area of the Core strongly indicated that there was need for effective teaching of communication skills at the upper level or coursework. The director of the UCA Core worked with faculty in the School of Communication to secure funding to support positions in WAC/WID, and is now requesting the same for Communication. These efforts are coordinated, often, with CETAL to provide development opportunities for faculty. These efforts support the mission of the UCA Core.

[15] Details of specific interventions can be found in the UCA Core annual assessment data and reports, located at: https://uca.edu/core/for-faculty/ (Under UCA Core Handbook and Assessment Plan)

V. Program Effectiveness

The ten year review/self-study affords UCA the opportunity to assess and evaluate the significant revisions to the general education program that began with the adoption of the UCA Core. Although the UCA Core is not a degree conferring program and thus is not mandated by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) to perform routine self-studies, the UCA campus maintains that it is worthwhile to treat the general education program as if it were, thereby incentivizing reflection and continuous improvement. The previous sections of the report provide a snapshot of the academic assessment data related to the UCA Core as well as articulations of selected improvement measures. The supporting documentation helps provide a fuller, more comprehensive, picture of the management of the program to date. What follows below is a summary assessment of the current condition of the program.

Strengths

The greatest strength of the UCA Core program is its intentional structure. Being designed around four competency areas with clearly articulated goals and student learning outcomes assures that all courses offered as part of the general education curriculum at UCA are intentionally placed to promote discrete learning objectives for our students. We thus avoid the historical problem of a "menu style" general education program where offerings are ostensibly arbitrary but in reality reflect territorial disputes, not pedagogical or curricular coherence and design. The UCA Core is intentionally designed around a set of learning outcomes determined by best practice across higher education and reflective of community need. In addition, having a general education curriculum that is scaffolded across both lower division and upper division coursework indicates that UCA views general education as the promotion of fundamental learning outcomes that span the totality of a student's education and does not end in the first or second year. Thus, beyond simply introducing students to crucial concepts of skills, such as critical inquiry, UCA's general education program promotes the continuous engagement with these outcomes ultimately promoting mastery for all students regardless of discipline. UCA has thus made a firm commitment to foundational education skills and outcomes, building them intentionally into a student's full four year curriculum at UCA.

In support of this ambitious redesign of general education at UCA, the UCA Core is a fully assessable and assessed general education program. In short order from the adoption of the UCA Core to full implementation, an assessment plan was developed and implemented that allows the general education

program across campus to be fully assessed every four years, providing campus with a snapshot of how students are performing across all the learning outcomes, at all levels of coursework, that define general education at UCA. Assessment provides a window onto UCA's performance regarding its commitment to students, namely, whether it provides the educational experiences and opportunities it purports to provide. Assessment data is used to develop interventions when necessary to shore up weaknesses withing the curriculum and provide additional resources to faculty to best deliver educational experiences that promote the outcomes of the UCA Core, as the development of the WAC/WID program noted above demonstrates.

The assessment process itself is viable. The requirements on particular faculty are far from cumbersome, merely requiring submission of student course work, which can be readily done electronically. Having trained faculty scorers, calibrated on the rubrics provides reliable data with interrater reliability being well within acceptable limits. The process, as designed, thus provides a representative sample of student work across campus, scored consistently by trained faculty, resulting in data reflective of student performance. These data can be used, then, to identify exemplary courses and develop best practices across campus, as was done regarding the Responsible Living and Diversity competencies, for example, or courses where work needs to be done and providing faculty development opportunities. This process has fomented constructive relationships with departments and faculty, promoting a culture of shared expectations across campus, and ultimately, improved student performance, on the whole.

In addition, after a complete review of all lower division Core courses, campus can be assured that all courses currently residing in the lower division Core are well-aligned to Core learning outcomes, and thus provide a meaningful engagement with the Core competency under which they are placed. The audit of the lower division Core served to both assure that we had consistent expectations and experiences across campus regardless of discipline, and assure faculty that regardless of course content or subject prefix, all students matriculating through the lower division Core were receiving a rigorous education consistent with our stated goals.

Weaknesses

Although the UCA Core is well-designed in theory, in practice there have been many hurdles to implementing the UCA Core, some of which have been successfully vaulted, others of which have been persistent stumbling blocks. One that continues to plague the program is the low participation rate of faculty, that is, far too few faculty submit student work when requested to do so. The result of low participation rates, as noted above, is that the data fail to be representative when it no longer is a sample of the campus population. In addition to failing to provide representative data, lack of faculty participation is indicative of a greater concern, namely, that faculty teaching in the UCA Core may not be aware that they are so teaching and thus are not intentionally designing course work to reflect and promote the student learning outcomes definitive of the UCA Core.

On the other side of the assessment process, we also have the issue of not effectively getting the data out to relevant stakeholders. Although the Office of Assessment produces an annual report and publishes this report online, campus as a whole is not offered an easy opportunity to digest and engage with assessment data for the UCA Core. The Office of Assessment does offer the option to develop personalized reports to departments and colleges, but few avail themselves of this service. In general, although the Office of Assessment does well to implement the assessment process for the UCA Core, getting the data to end users in a digestible format and engaging stakeholders in a constructive way with the data has been sporadic. A feedback loop is needed in order to reinforce to campus that assessment provides actionable data that results in meaningful improvements. The result of a more robust and visible feedback loop may be greater participation, as people are more likely to vest time and resources in a process from which they can see clear benefits.

Related to the practice of assessment, training on the front end needs to be more persistent and consistent. The fact that a common scorer observation is that assignments are poorly designed to reflect the learning of students across the outcomes of the UCA Core is indicative of a problem with assignment design, namely, that faculty either don't know that their assignment needs to be well aligned to these learning outcomes, or they are unclear on how to do so. Although the Office of Assessment holds annual training sessions on assignment design and selection, clearly these are insufficient if poorly aligned assignments are a persistent problem.

Another area in which the UCA Core is well-designed in theory but has failed to live up to its mission in practice regards the scaffolding of the UCA Core as a whole. Scaffolding in education is about

introducing students to skills and then, through an iterative process, building up those skills to mastery. In courses we do so by means of successive assignments. In a curriculum we do so by means of successive course work, thus introductory courses prepare us for more advanced work, until we demonstrate mastery in culminating experience such as a senior project, thesis, or even dissertation. The UCA Core was designed, as any intentional curriculum, with this goal in mind. Thus, the lower division Core provides an introductory experience for students. Subsequently, all students are required to take upper division coursework in the same areas of the UCA Core. These upper level courses are meant to assist students in further developing the skills introduce at the lower level to achieve a degree of mastery. However, in practice alignment between the learning outcomes at the lower level and the learning outcomes at the upper level cannot be guaranteed meaning that scaffolding in practice occurs by chance, if at all. As noted above, a student may take a Responsible Living course at the lower level that assesses for Goal B (well-being), such as Nutrition 1300. However, at the upper level, if they are a liberal arts major, and they take an upper division Responsible Living course in Political Science or Philosophy, it will assess under Goal A (ethics). Since goals A and B have different learning outcomes, this student does not have a scaffolded curriculum when it comes to the Responsible Living competency. When this occurs routinely, across the entirety of the curriculum, a fundamental component of the UCA Core, namely the notion that it is a developmental curriculum spanning a student's full career at UCA, is subverted.

Finally, trainings and improvement measures have been inconsistently developed and implemented. Although the director of the program clearly strives to provide regular faculty development opportunities, including pre-assessment workshops and post-assessment development sessions, in reality these have been sporadic with limited success. Well-intentioned and thoughtful in design, they have failed to meet a large campus audience and have thus been minimally impactful. Some of this fault may reside with faculty who fail to participate or chairs who fail to promote participation, but a lack of consistently in offerings and thus routinization sure is to blame as well. Although the director has worked with the center for teaching excellence regarding first year seminars, and has held sessions related to best practices across all competencies for campus, these have been poorly attended and thus the effect minimal in terms of promoting awareness across campus and improvements in courses. Yet each struggle, when seen clearly, affords possibilities for improvement.

Opportunities

Regardless of the challenges noted above, there are several opportunities to both address those difficulties and improve the general education program.

With respect to participation and promoting a culture of assessment, specifically appreciation for assessment as a component of continuous improvement, we might adopt principles from management. For example, if one considers the service industry specifically, and treats higher education as a service industry, which it essentially is, then in addition to assessment of outcomes we ought also monitor the provision of the service, that is, faculty. In this regard, if we are attempting to improve participation in the process we might coordinate better with chairs to both motivate faculty to integrate more Core assessment measures into classroom practices but also to motivate participation in general by tying participation in university assessment to faculty performance evaluations. Connecting with managers (i.e. chairs) in this manner may prove more effective in promoting standards and assuring compliance than hollow edicts from a centralized authority many faculty view as distanced. Chairs have the effective means and ability to incentivize participation through both positive and negative reinforcements that more directly and immediately impact faculty.

In terms or discrete opportunities, the most obvious from the previous assessment cycles is a review of the Core structure and the rubrics. It is clear from scorer comments, those who must use the assessment rubrics, that they are well constructed but in need of improvement, or simplification. Given the need to revisit the rubrics, as well as the problem of scaffolding, the readiest solution to the problem may be to condense rubrics that are unnecessarily distinct, such as under the diversity competency. Could a singular rubric capture the assessable and valuable outcomes currently residing under 3 distinct rubrics? Regardless, the wording of the rubrics could be revisited to be made more precise and thus more functional. Addressing the rubrics also affords the opportunity to address two related problems, scaffolding and the capstone experience.

With respect to scaffolding, simpler rubrics would allow for easier alignment between lower and upper division courses. If there were a single diversity rubric, then alignment would be guaranteed. Barring this elegant resolution to the problem, we must take this opportunity to review scaffolding of the curriculum generally and assure that the foundation we provide at the lower division is appropriately reinforced at the upper division.

In addition to scaffolding, the capstone experience has not received nearly the attention it merits. We have been inordinately focused on lower division course work, form the lower division core to the first year experience. But if the general education program is to be a constructive part of the student's full education at UCA then the capstone needs to be a signature, interdisciplinary experience that reinforces the skills introduce at the lower division while integrating the students chosen academic field. Currently the capstone merely assesses under critical inquiry and effective communication, but there is no guidance for faculty on crafting a genuine capstone experience, nor is there any discussion of the need for this or how it might be accomplished. Given that the lower division core is well grounded, the FYS is under firm stewardship, and the assessment process as a whole is functional, save for the participation and feedback problems noted above, the next few years would be a perfect opportunity to begin discussing the capstone experience across campus. In addition, the upper division core requires the same level of maintenance the lower division has already received, namely, a full audit to assure that courses within the UD Coe are well aligned to Core outcomes. In general, the upper division has not been afforded the same care as the lower division core, and the next few years provide a chance to rectify this situation.

In general, the UCA Core is well-designed, even if implementation has been difficult and logistical problems persist in regards to data collection and dissemination. Overall, the UCA Core has proven a vast improvement over the previous general education program. If we can capitalize on our successes and address our shortcomings, the program should continue to provide UCA students with a firm foundation in fundamental academic skills and assist them as they progress throughout their career at UCA.