



Faculty Engagement Day 2024:  
Summary of Findings

Prepared by The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and  
Reporting

September 4, 2024

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## Executive Summary

On June 20, 2024, a Faculty Engagement Day was conducted to review core objectives assessment results and propose improvements.

Faculty members were organized into groups based on core objectives and presented with various data sets, including specific core objective assessment results, NSSE data, and Exit Survey data. The day's activities included individual reflection using a Reflection Sheet, followed by small group discussions, and reporting of findings to the larger group.

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Reporting (IER) analyzed resulting data, derived key findings, and formulated recommendations emphasizing the expected impact and feasibility of proposed actions.

Key findings from faculty discussions include:

1. Misalignment between instructional components (syllabi, assignments, methods) and assessment processes (rubrics).
2. Inadequate faculty training in core objectives assessment principles and methods.
3. Insufficient support for faculty in integrating core objectives assessment into existing course content and teaching approaches.

IER Recommendations based on faculty discussions:

1. **Alignment:** Faculty to review and revise signature assignments and rubrics to ensure coherence.
2. **Training:** Office of Distance Education and IER to develop a course on core objectives assessment for faculty teaching core courses.
3. **Integration:** IER to train Faculty Success staff to provide one-on-one consultations, helping faculty incorporate core objectives instruction and assessment into existing courses.

## Thematic Overview of Collected Data

This section summarizes the main recommendations that emerged across core objectives during small group discussions and in individual reflection worksheets. These themes form the basis for the recommendations outlined in the Executive Summary.

Legend:

[CT] - Critical Thinking

[SR] - Social Responsibility

[PR] - Personal Responsibility

[COM] - Communication Skills

[EQS] - Empirical and Quantitative Skills

## Faculty Recommendations for Curricular and Instructional Improvements

### Alignment of Curriculum and Objectives:

*Align course content, syllabi, and assignments with core curriculum objectives, and AAC&U Value rubrics.*

- [CT: Ensure course coordinators have access to UTA-wide outcomes on CANVAS, Align CANVAS outcomes with rubrics]
- [SR: Align the THECB core objectives with the rubric more closely]
- [PR: Review and update courses according to the six core objectives and assessment rubrics]

### Use of Rubrics and Signature Assignments:

*Incorporate rubrics and signature assignments in all relevant courses, simplifying rubrics for better student understanding, and aligning these assignments with core objectives.*

- [CT: Ensure course coordinators are given appropriate rubrics]
- [EQS: Ensure all core courses have rubric-evaluated signature assignments]
- [SR: Redesign signature assignments to better align with objectives]

### Engagement and Relevance:

*Make courses more engaging and relevant to students by integrating core objectives with their majors and provide opportunities for independent and creative thinking.*

- [CT: Examine how second- and third-year courses are taught, particularly in subjects like math, to engage students more deeply and effectively]
- [EQS: Provide regular "signature-assignment-type" activities for independent and creative thinking]
- [PR: Aid in engaging students in core courses by helping them make connections to their majors]

### Clear Communication and Expectations:

*Improve communication of rubrics, objectives, and expectations to both faculty and students.*

- [CT: Ensure clear communication to faculty about objectives and expectations, make rubrics and expectations clear for faculty and communicate them to students, provide direct instruction about expectations beyond course content and use grading rubrics with relevant dimensions]
- [EQS: Simplify rubrics to highlight main points]
- [PR: Inform and support instructors of core courses, especially those with multiple sections, in the implementation process]

## Faculty Recommendations for Student and Faculty Support Services and Resources

### Regular Reviews and Evaluations:

*Conduct frequent self-evaluations, course reviews, and departmental reviews are suggested to maintain and improve the alignment of course content with core objectives.*

- [CT: Encourage departments to conduct more frequent self-evaluations, conduct training and review sessions via the Student Learning Center]
- [EQS: Conduct annual or bi-annual course reviews with key faculty or course coordinators]
- [PR: Review and update courses according to the six core objectives and assessment rubrics]

### Training and Professional Development:

*Institute faculty training programs and professional development opportunities to help instructors understand and effectively implement core objectives, design formative assessments, and develop signature assignments.*

- [CT: Improve communication with faculty regarding expectations and feedback and provide training and reviews at the department level]
- [SR: Faculty training is needed to develop signature assignments]
- [COM: Implement faculty development programs to better understand the process and purpose of the signature assignments]

### Support Services:

*Establish support services like writing centers, speaking centers, and instructional videos to aid students in developing necessary skills, particularly in communication.*

- [COM: Require trips to the Writing Center and potentially establish a Speaking Center to support students]
- [COM: Create short instructional videos explaining how to identify and properly cite legitimate sources]

## Faculty Recommendations for Assessment Data Collection

### Assessment and Data Collection:

*Expand a range of assessment methods\ (e.g., surveys, statistical analysis, qualitative questions) employed at different times (e.g., during courses, exit surveys) to gather comprehensive data and insights.*

- [CT: Conduct a statistical analysis of differences in means and communicate the results, explore ways to make Exit surveys align better with core objectives]

- [EQS: Use qualitative/short answer questions in exit surveys and ensure statistical significance of data differences]
- [COM: Consider switching data collection to the fall semester, Disaggregate data by academic level]

#### **Feedback and Improvement:**

*Implement continuous feedback loops, including sharing assessment results and recommendations with instructors to foster ongoing improvement in teaching and learning processes.*

- [CT: Disseminate results of assessment and related recommendations to instructors involved in teaching the core curriculum]
- [EQS: Collaborate on revising signature assignments to improve achievement of core objectives]
- [COM: Offer specific teaching sessions and writing clinics targeting key skills]

## Detailed Findings by Core Objectives

This section presents detailed findings and recommendations offered by faculty during the Faculty Engagement Day separated by core objectives.

### Critical Thinking Skills

From 2016 to 2023, there has been a significant decline in assessment scores across most dimensions, except for the Explanation of Issues dimension. Faculty speculated whether this decline was due to the impact of COVID-19 or changes in UTA's admission policies. Although there was improvement between the first and second years, progress stagnated beyond that point. Faculty were particularly surprised by the minimal progress observed from freshman to senior year, especially between the second and fourth years. They identified the presence of transfer students, who might not have received core objectives-related instruction at UTA, as a potential contributing factor.

Low scores in the "Student's Position" dimension were partly attributed to assignment prompts that do not directly address this rubric's goal. Faculty noted that course assignments were heavily focused on course content and could benefit from more direct instructions related to the Critical Thinking objective. The decline in performance compared to historical data was also attributed to the impact of COVID-19 during high school and the influence of a superficial, "sound bite" culture. UTA's assessment outcomes were more encouraging compared to the UT System, particularly regarding critical thinking. However, there was a notable discrepancy between students' self-reported confidence and their actual competence, as evidenced by core objective assessment scores.

### Faculty Recommendations

- Core curriculum teachers should have a better understanding of its purpose and organization.
- Make rubrics and expectations clear for faculty and communicate them to students.
- Align CANVAS outcomes with rubrics.
- Provide direct instruction about expectations beyond course content and use grading rubrics with relevant dimensions.
- Encourage departments to conduct more frequent self-evaluations to help faculty maintain balance between course content and core objective-related instruction.
- Examine how second- and third-year courses are taught, particularly in subjects like math, to engage students more deeply and effectively.
- Increase the relevance of the core curriculum, possibly by adding a CANVAS course for core curriculum teachers.
- Improve communication with faculty regarding expectations and feedback and provide training and reviews at the department level.
- Ensure course coordinators have access to UTA-wide outcomes on CANVAS.
- Ensure course coordinators are given appropriate rubrics.
- Engage teachers in discussions and classes to encourage improvement and trying new approaches.
- Ensure clear communication to faculty about objectives and expectations.
- Conduct training and review sessions via the Student Learning Center.
- Investigate the reasons for discrepancies in the "Exit Survey" as students feel better prepared, but the data shows declining results.

- Connect core curriculum outcomes to assessment rubrics in CANVAS and generate reports across courses to add another data source.
- Conduct a statistical analysis of differences in means and communicate the results.
- Explore ways to make exit surveys align better with objectives.
- Disseminate results of assessment and related recommendations to instructors involved in teaching the core curriculum.

## Empirical and Quantitative Skills

A historical downward trend in mean scores was observed in the Empirical and Quantitative Skills Core Objective Assessment, with notable underperformance in the Assumptions, Application/Analysis, and Communication dimensions. The Assumptions dimension performed the worst. Faculty raised concerns about the quality of prompts, the statistical significance of ethnically disaggregated data, and the appropriateness of the effort students put into signature assignments. They also wanted to understand the impact of introducing a zero in the assessment scoring system and suggested the need for qualitative student comments.

Faculty had expected low scores in Application/Analysis, Assumptions, and Communication. Contrary to the common narrative, African American and Hispanic students outperformed white students, while juniors and seniors scored lower than freshmen. Male students also scored higher than female students. Overall, the results were lower than anticipated, with surprisingly few students using numerical data to draw conclusions.

Some faculty attributed student shortfalls to limited opportunities to practice skills in the Communication and Assumptions dimensions in MATH 1315 and a lack of relevant feedback. They emphasized the need for more opportunities for students to examine data independently or in groups, engage in independent thinking, and participate in writing activities. Low confidence in skills and inadequate prompts for evaluating the assumptions dimension were also considered contributing factors.

Results from NSSE and exit surveys indicated a misalignment between student perceptions and their scores, suggesting inconsistencies between direct and indirect data on core objective assessments.

## Faculty Recommendations

- To strengthen the achievement of core objectives, faculty suggest keeping them central and using specific language in teaching.
- Provide regular "signature-assignment-type" activities for independent and creative thinking and ensure clearer assignment prompts.
- Incorporate core objective language into assignment prompts and integrate VALUE rubric items into daily instruction to further support learning.
- Collaborate on revising signature assignments to improve achievement of core objectives.
- Student advisors should encourage earlier course enrollment.
- Simplify rubrics to highlight main core points, making them easier for students to understand and use for their assignments.
- Faculty experts should review and modify assignments to align with core objectives.
- Conduct annual or bi-annual course reviews with key faculty or course coordinators.



- Ensure all core courses have rubric-evaluated signature assignments and a variety of other course assignments that align with the rubric.
- Collect written comments from students and design rubric-graded signature assignments for Calculus courses to use in data collection.
- A broader selection of core courses used for core objectives assessment is needed.
- Include information about the weight of signature assignments in student grades, as this affects work quality.
- Use qualitative/short answer questions in exit surveys and ensure statistical significance of data differences to offer deeper insights.

## Social Responsibility

Overall results met the benchmark but were lower than expected. Scores for the 2022-2023 academic year were lower across all dimensions compared to 2016. The Attitudes/Openness dimension received the lowest score, while Knowledge/Cultural Self-Awareness scored the highest, yet both dimensions were still below the benchmark. Interrater agreement was deemed acceptable, though the sample size for ethnicity and gender was small. Rubrics are now more specific compared to when the core was created.

Students perceived themselves as well-prepared, which was not supported by direct assessment data. UTA students perform better than UTS students in understanding diverse perspectives but less well in community engagement.

Surprisingly, males scored higher than females, and African American and Hispanic students outperformed white students for this objective. However, the data could be skewed by the smaller sample size of male students in women's studies courses. The overall score decreased with the addition of a zero to the scoring system.

Faculty acknowledged that quantitatively assessing values and attitudes like curiosity and openness is challenging. They noted that current signature assignments might not effectively assess these areas, as they lack the needed type of reflection, and suggested revisions to better align with objectives and offer opportunities to demonstrate these skills. Other possible reasons for student shortfalls include unclear teaching methods, the challenge of teaching skills like empathy, issues in grading practices, and the absence of effective rubrics for measuring these abilities.

## Faculty Recommendations

- Redesign signature assignments to better align with objectives and provide opportunities to demonstrate empathy, curiosity, and openness.
- Align core objectives with the rubric more closely, as well as align the rubric with course and signature assignments.
- Incorporate exposure to social differences.
- Faculty training is needed to develop signature assignments, which will be utilized in all relevant courses.
- Assessment and exit surveys should focus on seniors who began as freshmen, considering many seniors and juniors are transfer students.
- Survey students once they complete the core.

- Conduct surveys of students currently in courses, rather than just exit surveys, to ensure objectives are taught, not just assessed.
- The longitudinal data on using the 0-4 rubric is needed to analyze performance over time.

## Personal Responsibility

In 2016, students had a greater sense of personal responsibility, indicating a decline in recent years. The mean score for all students is 1.8, below the benchmark of 2.0, although the senior-level mean is 2.13. Freshmen do not seem to view themselves as informed or active citizens. Overall performance is poor, particularly in the Applying Knowledge dimension. Changes in the rubric make it difficult to compare new data to old, as the previous rubric on ethics was more precise. The inter-rater agreement is 0.55, which is fair but insufficient.

Minimal gender differences were observed, while Black and white students showed a lower sense of personal responsibility overall. A global perspective might be more common among Asian and Hispanic students, resulting in performance differences.

Some confusion exists due to discrepancies between percentages and scores; exit surveys reported in terms of scores might be more helpful. The Exit Survey does not address the personal responsibility objective (as measured by the Global Learning VALUE rubric) with much specificity. Students are confident but lack competence. There is a noted difference between first-year and senior-year NSSE data, supporting trends of improvement from the first year to senior year in core assessment.

## Faculty Recommendations

- Update syllabi to better align professional practices classes with core objectives to address any lack of understanding about how professional programs teach content connected to core objectives.
- Introduce a World Civilization course that aligns with Global Competency within the core curriculum and use pre-post tests to measure effectiveness.
- Review and update courses according to the six core objectives and assessment rubrics, using backward design to better align teaching in class.
- Integrate global competency into all degrees within the core curriculum, aligning with UTA's strategic plan.
- Provide support in curriculum design, including peer support to renew and improve syllabi, as well as professional development.
- Inform and support instructors of core courses, especially those with multiple sections, in the implementation process:
  - Help them understand the reasons behind the core objectives.
  - Assist in designing formative assessments that create a progression leading up to the signature assignment (e.g., Task 1, Task 2, Task 3, Signature Assignment).
  - Aid in engaging students in core courses by helping them make connections to their majors, addressing the issue of students attending without seeing the relevance.
- Break down data by disciplines.
- Review the Exit Survey and align it with core curriculum rubrics.
- Include student interviews or surveys in addition to assessing assignments. Utilize student feedback survey data for a more complete picture and triangulation.

## Communication Skills

Oral communication scores have improved significantly in the Organization and Central Message dimensions. From 2018 to 2024, the mean scores for oral communication have increased, with most students feeling adequately or very well prepared to express thoughts and ideas in spoken communication. However, performance in the Supporting Material dimension remains somewhat low. Written communication scores have seen slight improvement from 2019 to 2024 but are still lower than oral communication scores, with students feeling less prepared in this area. There is a difference between sole assessment and collective assessment, with sole numbers generally being higher. Citing sources and using them well is a difficult concept to grasp in one semester, especially if it is new to the students.

The Supporting Materials and Sources and Evidence dimensions are consistently the lowest categories for both types of communication, which was expected by the faculty. However, Source and Evidence scores have improved slightly since 2019. There may be a post-COVID drop in numbers due to "learning loss." Surprisingly, senior scores are lower than junior scores in most dimensions of oral communication.

Mean scores by ethnicity, gender, and academic level remain consistent, with freshmen scoring lower in Source and Evidence for written communication, which was anticipated. Oral delivery also appears to be challenging for some students, particularly freshmen.

Written communication skills may be declining due to various reasons such as less writing practice in high school, increased access to online resources that lead to academic dishonesty and plagiarism, decreased reading habits, and an inability to differentiate legitimate sources. Source and Evidence in written communication and Supporting Material in oral communication are the weakest areas because students often rely on opinions they have heard rather than citing sources or finding support for their arguments. Citing sources and using them well is a difficult concept to grasp in one semester, especially if it is new to the students.

There is uncertainty about whether the students reporting in the surveys even took these courses at UTA, and it is unclear which majors or classes prepared them. The NSSE data for 2022 shows low feedback from seniors on speaking skills. A general concern is that the signature assignments used in direct core objectives assessment are often administered in 1000-2000 level courses, and the exit surveys given to seniors may be disconnected from those assignments due to the time gap. Exit surveys only assess students who complete a degree, leaving out those who leave UTA without a degree.

### Faculty Recommendations

- To address the biggest area of deficiency - Source and Evidence/Supporting Material – it is recommended to emphasize related concepts more in all core courses that include communication as a foundational component.
- Increase integration, emphasis, and practice in teaching activities across the curriculum.
- Require trips to the Writing Center and potentially establish a Speaking Center to support students in developing their communication skills.
- Create short instructional videos explaining how to identify and properly cite legitimate sources. These should be used by all core curriculum instructors whose courses include communication as a foundational component, along with the resources available at the Writing Center.

- Offer specific teaching sessions and writing clinics targeting key skills, providing more engaged, dialogic feedback to students. Departments can organize these clinics to address common areas of difficulty.
- Implement faculty development programs to better understand the process and purpose of the signature assignments, addressing the drop in scores for written communication.
- Consider switching data collection to the fall semester.
- Disaggregate data by academic level and identify who completed courses at UTA versus elsewhere (transfer students).
- Broaden the sample to include students from various disciplines, not just one class or course.
- Correlate data with Writing Center data.
- Add questions to Exit Surveys about specific courses taken, especially for seniors, to understand the impact on the data.
- Address how AI and internet use might be influencing academic integrity and written communication skills.
- Create an assessment process that allows for comparison (e.g., part 1 assessing in 1000 – 2000 level courses; part 2 – in 3000-4000).