

Applied Critical Thinking at RIT

Intent of the Strategic Action Plan: The Applied Critical Thinking (ACT) Strategic Action Plan (SAP) for 2018-2021 is meant to guide the ACT initiative and reflect ACT-related goals of the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) Strategic Plan for 2025. As an initiative focused on a core 21st century skill, uniquely manifested by RIT, the ACT effort directly supports university goals and growth of university programming and reputation. This initiative is also crucial to the blending and growth of RIT's unique capabilities. The effort serves to attract, engage, and promote excellence in the application of critical thinking. ACT plays a formative role in accomplishing these university goals:

GOAL 1: Enroll and support a diverse mix of increasingly creative, multi-talented students.

GOAL 4: Continue to attract and retain world-class faculty committed to elevating RIT's collective excellence in scholarship, teaching, and service.

Goal 8: Design and integrate unique curricular experiences at the intersection of RIT's programs in Technology, Art, and Design (TAD). Design new and revise existing programs in non-STEM disciplines that increase enrollment through this same distinctive integrated core.

GOAL 16: Create a distinctive RIT brand and develop a supporting content marketing strategy that makes use of all relevant media.

This plan follows the initial ACT SAP for 2015-2018; the SAP is a guidance document that is in turn supported by the annual plans of work for the Fram Chair, the Fram Faculty Fellow and administrative support. This plan outlines our university-wide effort to drive RIT's contribution and recognition in the domain of applied critical thinking. While each focus area is presented separately, the elements are interrelated. This plan centers on impacting the student experience, and therefore, student engagement is THE key part of our efforts.

Definitions of Applied Critical Thinking: The roots of critical thinking lie in philosophy, however, critical thinking is a broadly applicable skill, and generally involves evaluating information, developing a point of view or argument and problem solving. It also serves as the foundation of creation and innovation. Currently, there [are many definitions and ways that critical thinking is applied](#) at RIT.

Aim & Rationale: Applied Critical Thinking is a core component of RIT's vision to provide leading-edge programs for the skilled, adaptive, and forward-thinking professional of the future. Critical thinking is an integral part of RIT's curricula and the overall student experience. Beyond professional capability, graduates need broadly applicable skills like critical thinking to be able to discern, navigate through, and use vast amounts of information. To be agile and adaptable in a globally competitive society, graduates must possess information literacy and acuity, the ability to assess complex interconnected systems and processes, and the capability of thriving within evolving technological, aesthetic, and social environments.

This evolution is impacting our relationship with our world, redefining our communities, and altering how our businesses function. We must do our part to create a workforce and a society that can flourish under such challenging conditions. We value thinking that is purposeful, effective, engaged, and supports the ability to be agile and adaptable. Therefore, **RIT will support and grow applied critical thinking by: engaging with the whole community; developing faculty, staff, and especially student ACT capacity; and contributing to our world through our responsible thinking and quality scholarship.** We are building a national reputation in applied critical thinking excellence.

Structure of the initiative: The growth and longevity of the Applied Critical Thinking effort depends upon the engagement of the entire community. Therefore, to support this engagement, RIT has appointed a chair to lead the effort, the Eugene H. Fram Chair in Applied Critical Thinking within the Office of Academic Affairs. The current chair is Dr. Jennifer Schneider, a professor of risk engineering of the College of Engineering Technology. Supporting and advising their efforts are the (internal) [Fram Faculty & Staff Advisory Board \(FAB\)](#) and [Fram External Advisory Board \(FEAB\)](#).

The duties of the **Fram Advisory Board (FAB)** and **International Campus Advisory Board (IFAB)** are to:

- Guide the Applied Critical Thinking efforts at RIT campuses, including creation and stewardship of this strategic action plan, and
- Advocate/be a conduit for Applied Critical Thinking within the colleges and units of RIT.

The duties of the **Fram External Advisory Board (FEAB)** are: to advise RIT's applied critical thinking effort through review of the SAP, current activities and accomplishments, and provide guidance for future efforts. The SAP reflects the structure noted in the Figure 1.

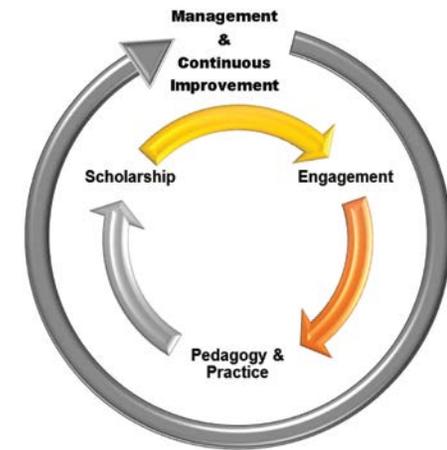


Figure 1: ACT SAP Structure

Management & Continuous Improvement: These are the operational aspects of the initiative that form the foundation of success.

Strategy/Action	Description	Metric of Performance/ Deliverables	Responsible party (Target date)
Update Fram SAP for 2018-2021	Create plan, formulate metrics/goals (reflected in annual POWs)	Recommendations & initial implementation, longer term reflected in annual Plans of Work for Fram Department	J. Schneider, A. Decker, FAB (initial Fall 2018)
Map SAP to new RIT strategic plan and support RIT plan goals through implementation ACT efforts	Support and lead implementation as appropriate	Provide recommendations to Academic Affairs leadership	J. Schneider, (draft map, Jan 2018; implementation, ongoing)
Implement all the procedures for events, budgets and processes	Event, Engagement, Communication & Outreach/ News, Budget; recognizable stance	Codify practices, including website, newsletters, budgets, materials, etc.	A Brodie, J. Schneider, (ongoing)
Create & implement an external engagement strategy	Share our model, best practices and generate a wider conversation on the application of critical thinking through other RIT campus sites, peer universities & others	Create plan, implement with peer schools then others;	J. Schneider, FAB, FEAB (initial Summer 2019, then ongoing per plan)
Recognize and celebrate excellence	Provide opportunities to measure ongoing success-Fram award, etc.	Celebrate success (compile profile)	J. Schneider (ongoing)

Engagement: Awareness & Participation (*particularly by students*): Creating engagement and alignment is a crucial step toward expanding capacity as well as building a reputation for excellence in ACT, and supporting the implementation of the SAP. Since Applied Critical Thinking is a complex, multi-dimensional construct, it is useful to select a series of themes to guide us.

Strategy/Action	Description	Metric of Performance/ Deliverables	Responsible party (Target date)
Foster a student centered focus for the initiative	Ensure that efforts support student learning, success and confidence within all RIT campuses and external to RIT; Seek student representation on FAB	Measured student impact through curricula, programming and events; Track engagement profile, monthly or as appropriate	FAB, J. Schneider, (ongoing) A. Brodie (Aug. 2012, ongoing)
Assess opportunity for 'Thinker in Residence'	Explore creating residence program for internal or external thinkers and innovative subject matter experts to expand impact and increase penetration of ACT-related concepts at the program level	Submit budget request for approval, implement as funded	J. Schneider, (initial Jan 2019)
Hosting of impactful events designed to inspire the RIT community	Determine annual theme and select, schedule & host or cohost events in support of other units	Fram signature events (campus wide or cross college) and targeted events, with accounting of engagement metrics in each.	J. Schneider, FAB (ongoing), metrics A. Brodie
Improve visibility and profile of ACT so students can identify their current level of competency and future growth of ACT skills	Incorporate ACT concepts and language into university marketing, orientation, Year One, etc.	Implementation pending approval	J. Schneider (plan 2019, begin process in 2020, pending approval)
Increase overall engagement, including graduate students	Work with student facing leadership- eg deans to identify and implement opportunities for all students	Successful implementation	J. Schneider (ongoing)

Strategy/Action	Description	Metric of Performance/ Deliverables	Responsible party (Target date)
Increase RIT international campus engagement in overall effort	Work with campus designees (IFAB) to design and implement appropriate initiatives	Successful phased implementation	J. Schneider (evaluate Fall 2018, begin implementation Spring 2019)
Explore moving of Fram office location	Determine best options	Possible move	J. Schneider (2019)

Pedagogy & Practice

It is imperative that efforts in ACT be led by the faculty and staff at RIT. Therefore, we must support initiatives to develop their capacity as they will be the leaders and exemplars of applied critical thinking at RIT and ambassadors in the global community. This goal will support the teaching, learning, and development of opportunities to practice this complex skillset. Not only do our students gain applied critical thinking skills from within our classrooms, they also gain from exposure in extracurricular activities, and through experiential education opportunities, etc. Further, critical thinking is a skill that supports the growth of leadership, innovation, and diversity, thereby contributing to the ability of our students to be effective and impactful citizens. We aim to integrate applied critical thinking within the whole student experience, by leveraging efforts in corollary initiatives at RIT such as the Simone Center for Innovation, Leadership, International Education, Grey Matter, Teachers on Teaching, etc.

Strategy/Action	Description	Metric of Performance/ Deliverables	Responsible party (Target date)
Continue to foster a community of practice to share and increase our capabilities	Provide various venues and opportunities, including building web materials	Manage the newsletter and assist with implementing events per year	A. Brodie
Integrate ACT into Provost Innovation Learning Grants or separated funding source(s)	Include as appropriate, support faculty community; began initial teaching circle 2018-19;	Submit budget request (Jan 2019) then implementation as funding allows	J. Schneider (as funded in cycle)
Assist with completion of rubrics for ACT SLOs	Work with assessment office & faculty team to create and share rubrics for SLOs	Completion	J. Schneider (May 2019)
Evaluate need to reorganize or edit SLOs as appropriate	Work with Assessment Office & advisories to review and reorganize as appropriate	Recommendations to stakeholders for approval	J. Schneider (May 2020)
Design and implement a longitudinal assessment of an UG ACT student cohort	Design & implementation of cross sectional cohort and initial data gathering	Successful implementation of university wide specific assessment process	J. Schneider (initiated Fall 2018, implemented by Spring 2021)

Strategy/Action	Description	Metric of Performance/ Deliverables	Responsible party (Target date)
Evaluate the need for a 'problem structure and solving' program SLO	Create report with recommendations based upon stakeholder and process investigation	Assess implementation as appropriate	J. Schneider (initial recommendation Spring 2019)
Draft a methodology (dashboard) for integration and evaluation of ACT skills as part of the student experience	Create report with recommendations based upon stakeholder and process investigation	Assess & implement	J. Schneider (initial recommendation May 2019, then ongoing)
Investigate the recognition of ACT-related courses/ ACT designation on courses, i.e. "Fram Scholar"	Determine path for CT course designation for interested students (e.g. reflect on Course Action Form, develop vetting process, award endorsed certificate of completion, etc.). Require CT as part of program proposal template and outline.	Work with FAB to outline goal & process; Produce recommendation, possible implement depending upon findings	J. Schneider & FAB (report, Spring 2020)
Investigate the implementation ACT honors courses	Work with Honors to determine if it is desired to provide path for courses with designation	Offer option to main campus	J. Schneider (2020-2021)

Scholarship: Scholarship is a crucial part of our long-term contribution to ACT at RIT. It results in recognition and establishes RIT's institutional reputation regarding our efforts. By leveraging our diverse capacity, we can contribute substantially to the ongoing discussion in applied critical thinking across all domains. Further, our history as an experientially-focused institution gives us a strong foundation in the application of critical thinking to today's challenges.

Strategy/Action	Description	Metric of Performance/ Deliverables	Responsible party (Target date)
Engage with student research efforts to determine & celebrate student research thinking	Assess opportunity to recognize student research as demonstration of CT	Implementation	J. Schneider & FAB (Spring 2019)
Evaluate the opportunity to engage RIT pedagogy scholars	Assess interest in ACT pedagogical scholarship	Active outreach to RIT scholars, report of effort/success	J. Schneider & FAB (2020)
Investigate possibility of open access journal to drive publication & discussion of ACT efforts	OA journal outcome or other journal	Determine feasibility and applicability to RIT and peer schools	J. Schneider & FAB (Spring 2021)
Seek funding sources (e.g. grants, foundations, development)	Seek funding	Determination of possible funding sources, possible grant application	J. Schneider (ongoing)