

Applied Critical Thinking at RIT

Intent of the Strategic Action Plan: The Applied Critical Thinking (ACT) Strategic Action Plan (SAP) for 2022-2025 is meant to guide the ACT initiative and reflect ACT related goals of the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) Strategic Plan for 2025. This plan follows previous action plans for 2015-2018 and 2018 to 2025 (to coincide with the university plan). The SAP is a guidance document that is in turn supported by the annual plans of work for the Fram office. This plan outlines our university-wide effort to drive RIT's contributions 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: While the roots of critical thinking lie in philosophy, 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. The Fram Advisory Board recommends that establishing a single definition is not useful, due to our diverse domains, and ACT can be represented in many ways.

Aim and Rationale: Applied Critical Thinking is a core component of RIT's vision to provide a leading-edge program for the skilled, adaptive, and forward-thinking professional of the future. Critical thinking is an integral part of RIT's curriculum and the overall student experience, and is a companion skill to producing effective communication and collaboration. Beyond discipline-specific professional expertise, graduates need broadly applicable skills like critical thinking to be able to navigate, analyze, 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, political, 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 campus and broader community; developing faculty, staff, and especially student ACT capacity; and contributing to our world through our responsible actions and quality scholarship.** We will build a national reputation in applied critical thinking excellence through collaboration between faculty, staff and students to generate a culture of critical thinking on and beyond campus. We will broaden our impact by engaging with alumni and including the rest of the Rochester (or local and regional) community in these efforts.

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. Jennifer Dilucia, Staff Assistant will provide administrative support. Supporting and advising their efforts are the (internal) [Fram Faculty & Staff Advisory Board \(FAB\)](#) and [Fram Executive Advisory Board \(FEAB\)](#).

The duties of the Fram Advisory Board (FAB) are to:

- Guide the Applied Critical Thinking efforts at RIT, 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 Executive Advisory Board (FEAB) are: to advise RIT's applied critical thinking effort through review of the SAP, current activities and accomplishments, and to provide guidance for future efforts. The SAP reflects the structure noted in Figure 1.

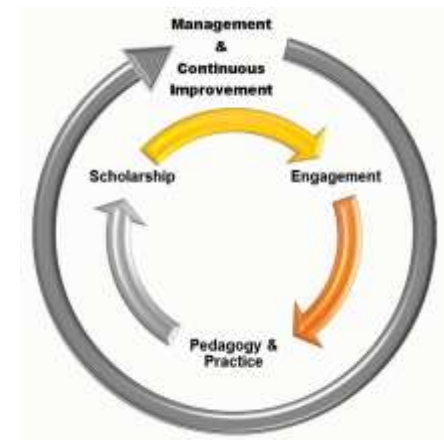


Figure 1: ACT SAP

Acronyms:

ACT- Applied Critical Thinking;

Advisory Boards: selected through their constituency, for expertise and interests, no term limits;

FAB- Fram Advisory Board, Faculty and Staff advisors representing each student facing unit on the Rochester campus;

FEAB: Fram Executive Advisory Board, RIT alumni and distinguished community members;

IFAB: International Advisory Board, Faculty representing each RIT international campus community;

CoP- community of practice, RIT community leaders that actively participate in and are examples of applied critical thinking in action, and are featured on the Fram ACT website and social media;

RGS- RIT Graduate School;

SLO - Student Learning Outcomes through which we measure student capacity to demonstrate critical thinking;

SAP- This strategic action plan that must align with the university plan;

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 2022-2025 (to reflect university plan)	Create plan, formulate metrics/goals (reflected in annual Plans of Work)	Recommendations & initial implementation, longer term reflected in annual POWs for Fram Department	J. Schneider, Advisory boards (2022 and beyond)
Manage the implementation of the Fram ACT SAP	Support & lead implementation as appropriate	as noted in plan	J. Schneider, Fram Office & Advisory Boards
Implement all procedures for events, budgets and processes	Event, Engagement, Communication & Outreach/ News, Budget; recognizable;	Codify practices, including website, newsletters, budgets, materials;	J. Dilucia, J. Schneider (ongoing)
Create an external engagement strategy	Engagement strategy, focusing on social media	Create plan, engage with peer schools and track efforts	J. Schneider & J. Dilucia (with support) (ongoing)
Develop process for data gathering and evaluation to inform continuous improvement	Data review & benchmarking with advisory boards; re evaluate existing SLOs for update;	Measure success of efforts by impact; data stream update 2024; integrate with student success as appropriate	J. Schneider (ongoing, student success 2024) update SLOs- possible 2025 (awaiting course mgmt system)
Recognize and celebrate excellence	Provide opportunities to measure ongoing success-Fram award, Mind Field and CoP, etc.	Celebrate success (compile profile)	J. Dilucia as directed (ongoing)

Engagement: Awareness and 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, the Fram office will work with colleges to implement specific planning.

Strategy/Action	Description	Metric of Performance/ Deliverables	Responsible party (Target date)
Grow the reputation of ACT at RIT through the hosting of impactful events designed to inspire the RIT community	Select, schedule & host or cohost events in support	Fram signature events (campus wide or cross college) and targeted events, with accounting of engagement metrics in each. Implement at least 2 initiatives or events per year, track profile	J. Schneider, Fram Office (ongoing)
Make ACT ubiquitous so students can identify & explain their application of critical thinking	Explore methods of increasing awareness and engagement	Measure success of efforts by impact; determine data stream update 2024; integrate with student success as appropriate	J. Schneider (ongoing, student success 2024)
Increase RIT international campus engagement in overall effort	Work with campus designees to design & implement strategies for each campus	Successful implementation & ongoing improvement	J. Schneider & IFAB (ongoing)

Pedagogy and 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 both on and off campus. 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 across the whole student experience, by leveraging efforts in corollary initiatives at RIT such as the Simone Center for Innovation, the Center for Leadership and Student Engagement, International Education, and Student Affairs activities.

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 ongoing support- events, teaching circles, resources, etc.	Manage the newsletter with timely features and items	J. Dilucia, Fram Office (ongoing)
Integrate ACT into Provost Innovation Learning Grants or develop stand alone	Devise additional funding streams; Pilot Mind Field	As approved	J. Schneider (ongoing, pilot Mind fields internal 2022, external 2023, evaluate & possibly operationalize 2024 or 2025 with SHED)
Assist with updating of rubrics for ACT Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)	Support assessment office & faculty team	Ongoing	J. Schneider, Fram Office (ongoing)
Development of data concerning Undergraduate ACT student cohort	Design & implementation of cross sectional cohort and initial data gathering	Successful implementation of university wide specific assessment process	J. Schneider (Spring 2024)
Draft a methodology for integration and evaluation of ACT skills as part of the student experience and professional development	Develop opportunities, for example, Fram Badge, Mind Field, etc.	Assess implementation as appropriate	J. Schneider & advisory boards (ongoing)
Investigate specialized opportunity or recognition of ACT related courses/ ACT designation on courses, i.e. "Fram Scholar" or a minor related to critical thinking	Determine path for critical thinking 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, Fram Office, FAB (Spring 2025)

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, and in relevant peer review journals and venues. 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)
Evaluate the opportunity to engage RIT Community of Practice (CoP) and pedagogy scholars more directly in the effort	Assess interest in ACT pedagogical scholarship & faculty engagement	Explore holding events related to Community of Practice, report effort/success	Fram Office w FAB input (Fall 2024)
Engage with RIT graduate school for creation of GTA training and assess student research efforts to create connection with graduate student success	Support graduate student growth and research as a demonstration of critical thinking	Implementation	J. Schneider, FAB, RGS (Spring 2024)
Dissemination of ACT through publications and external engagement	Evaluate Open Access (OA) journal outcome or other publications	Dissemination activity	J. Schneider, FAB (Spring 2025)
Seek funding sources (e.g. grants, foundations, development)	Seek funding	Determination of possible funding sources, possible grant application	Fram Office (ongoing)