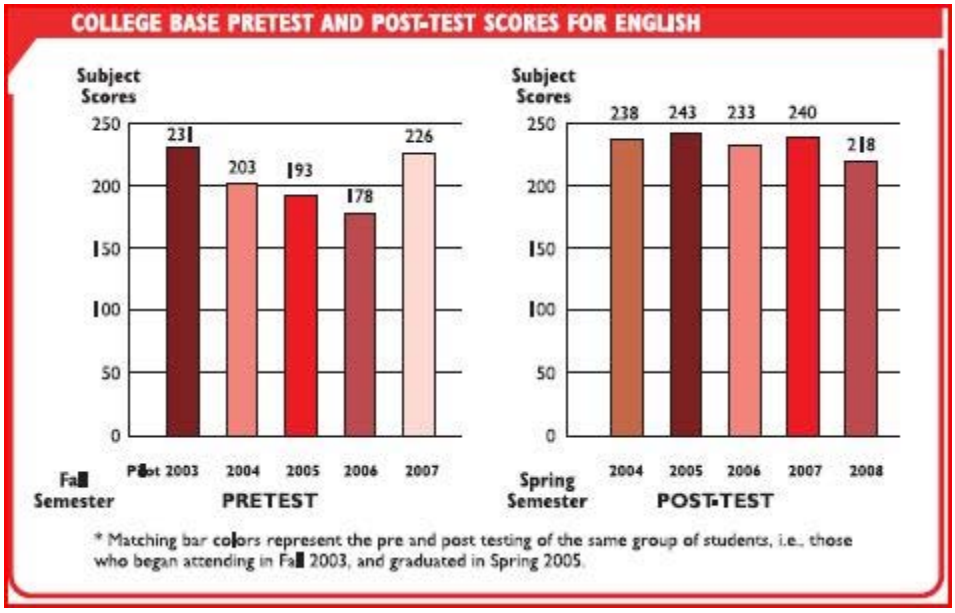
## General Education-Written Communication

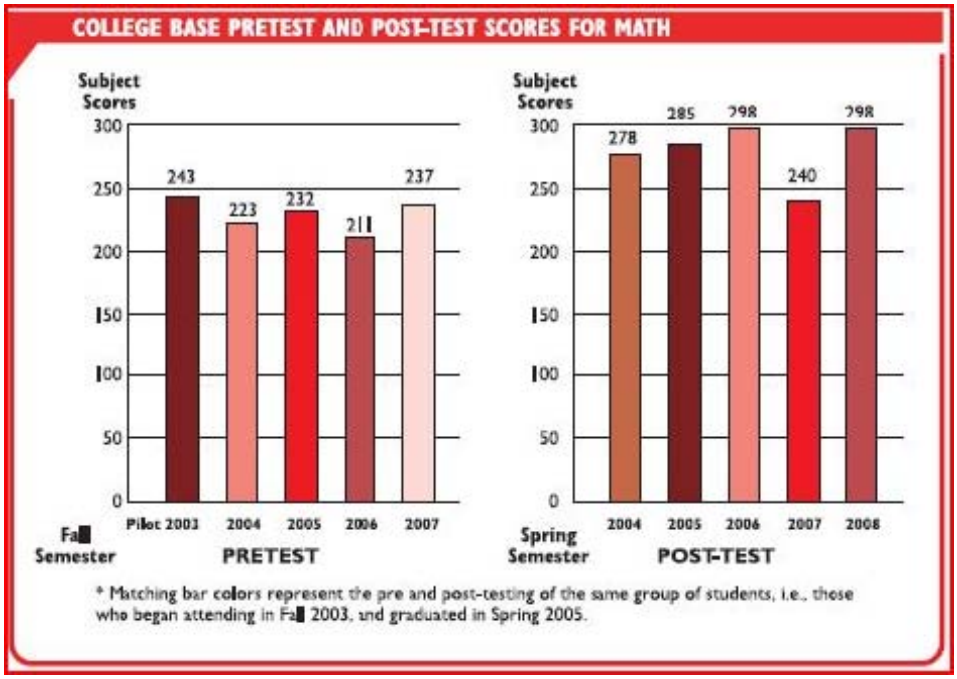
As of Summer 2008, the General Education Assessment Committee has compiled five cycles of College BASE pretest and post-test for analysis purposes in the areas of Written Communication (English) and Problem-Solving (math). The English portion of College BASE is broken down into two sections: reading and literature, and writing. The trend analysis of composite English pretest data indicates a 53-point decline in the skill level of entering freshmen from 2003 to 2006. This number rebounded for English and math in 2007. This jump may be due to the fact that the target testing audience changed. It has been increasingly difficult to identify students with less than 12 credit hours. However, the corresponding five-year post-test data reveals that sophomores preparing for transfer and/or graduation have an average increase of 28 points (*see chart below*). While pretest data indicates that the skill level of entering freshmen is on the decline, a more narrow range in the skill level of exiting sophomores is observed in the post-test. Curriculum changes based on assessment results have narrowed this gap. This finding additionally is supported by the increase in exit scores between Spring 2006 and Spring 2007. Even though the English skills of entering freshmen declined, the average gain in skill level increased and, simultaneously, the average skill level of students transferring and/or graduating remained relatively stable. Analysis indicates that the curriculum improvements based on assessment results enabled students entering with lower skill levels to reach the same exiting skill level as their better prepared counterparts.




## General Education-Problem-Solving

The institutional outcome of Problem-Solving (computational mathematics) also is gauged through College BASE. The math portion of College BASE tests three basic areas: general math, algebra and geometry. The composite math data comparing the average pretest skill level of entering freshmen to the average post-test data of exiting sophomores, denotes an average increase of 51 points over

a five-year cycle. As indicated in the General Education Assessment Timeline, curriculum changes appear to have improved student learning. The reason for the substantial decrease in 2007 post-test scores has not been determined because they rebounded the following year. Comparative analysis of Rend Lake College's average post-test score to the College BASE national averages from June 2004-September 2007 indicates that exiting Rend Lake College math test scores mirror the national average. Thus it would appear that overall, Rend Lake College students are much stronger in math than in English.



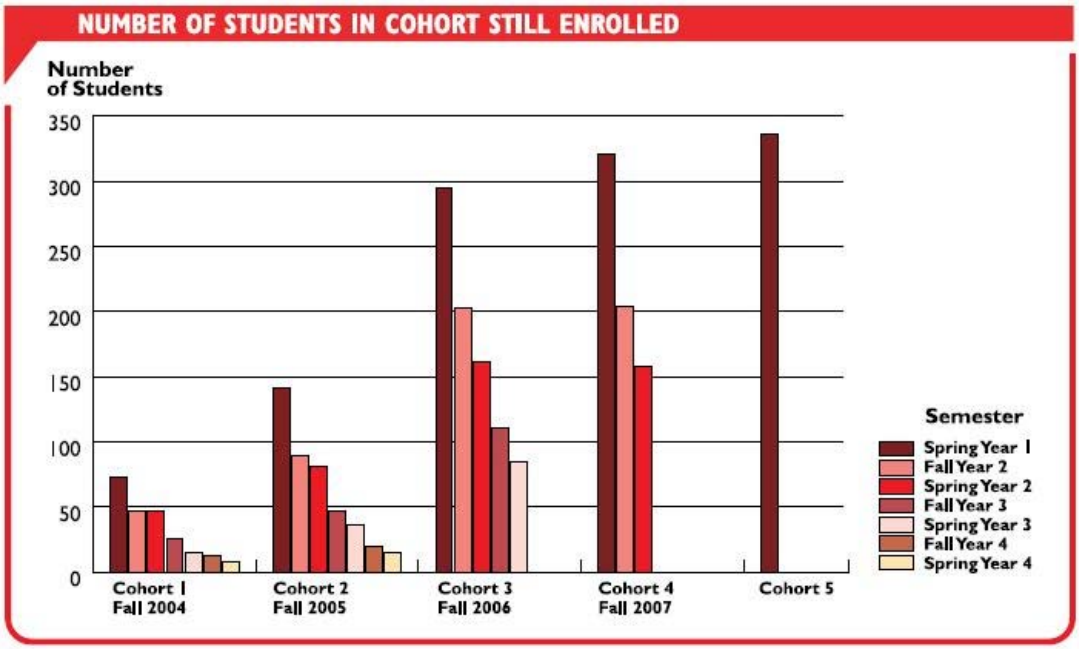

The aforementioned math and English curriculum changes were prompted upon yearly review of the College BASE data by the General Education Assessment Committee in conjunction with the English and math faculty. The most significant change in the English curriculum has been to emphasize critical thinking beginning in the Rhetoric and Composition I (ENGL 1101) course, which is required of all associate degree-seeking students. Faculty observations in the classroom along with student performance on College BASE critical thinking test questions led to a decision that a curriculum change was needed in both Rhetoric and Composition I and, subsequently, Rhetoric and Composition II (ENGL 1102). This curriculum change was piloted in Fall 2005 and implemented in Fall 2006 by adopting a new textbook with a critical thinking emphasis, having critical thinking workshops for all instructors of English, and restructuring the writing assignments to stress reflection and analysis. Additionally, critical thinking discussions prompted many science instructors to strengthen critical thinking exercises in their curriculum. Math faculty also reviewed the item analysis information provided by College BASE as it related to courses in the math sequence. As a result of the findings, standardized grading for all math instructors, increased mentoring of adjunct instructors by full-time instructors, and departmental final exams were implemented to provide more consistent instruction and grading. A complete record of assessment progress for general education can be found in the General Education Timeline. These course and program level changes based on analysis of assessment results have increased student learning in these areas.

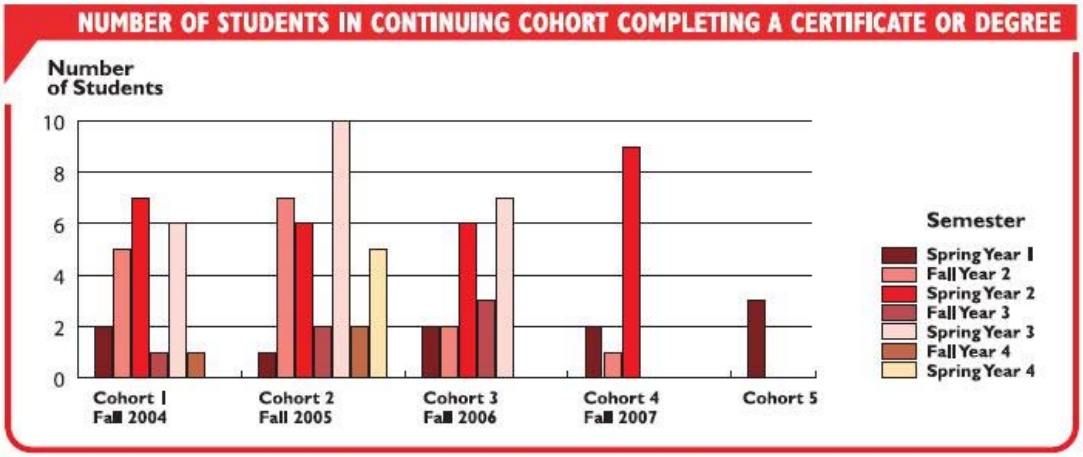
## General Education-Critical Thinking

The General Education Assessment Committee determined that critical thinking would be the institutional level assessment focus area for the 2008-2009 academic year. The College Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) Critical Thinking test was piloted as a post-test in the Spring 2008 semester following the same guidelines as used with College BASE. Comparing Rend Lake College post-test scores with the national average CAAP score, only a slight difference was observed. Rend Lake College sophomores with 45 or more credit hours scored 2.1 points lower (based on a 100 point scale) than the national average. It should be noted that students involved in the pilot may have completed the Rhetoric and Composition series before the curriculum was restructured to emphasize critical thinking. Thus, it is anticipated that the post-test scores will continue to increase as a result of this curriculum change. The first pretest of the CAAP critical thinking component will be administered in the Fall 2008 semester.

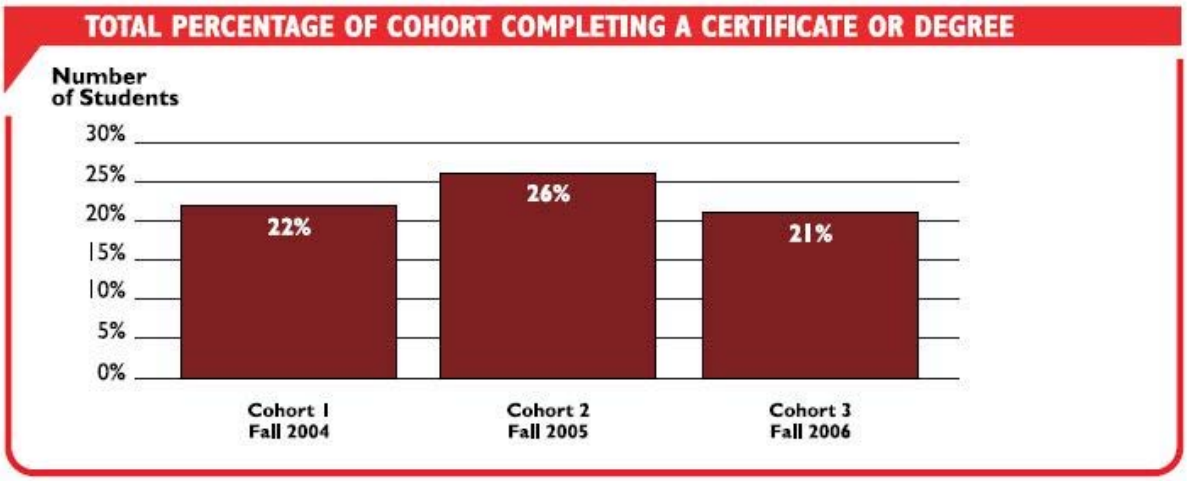
## College Prep Assessment

The College Prep Assessment Committee implemented a cohort report for the purposes of tracking underprepared students to gauge success rates in College Prep classes, subsequent transfer classes, retention, and graduation/completion rates. Cohorts are created in the fall semester and followed for a three-year period. The first cohort was created in Fall 2004. To date, five cohort groups exist for analysis purposes.






Curriculum changes and additional support services have been implemented in all areas of College Prep as a result of assessment findings. Problem-solving notebooks were created for math classes and an hour of lab was added to all College Prep math courses. During this lab hour the students work on assignments in their problem-solving notebooks and the instructor and in-class tutor are available to provide individualized instruction and answer questions. Additionally, standardized grading was incorporated for all College Prep math instructors. The awarding of bonus points was limited to a maximum of 3 percent of the final grade to insure that grades were not inflated. New math guidelines were implemented in Fall 2008 (*College Prep Math Guidelines*). Curriculum changes also have been implemented in College Prep English. College Prep English has been realigned with the transfer courses to emphasize critical thinking. Furthermore, new curriculum has been put in place in both reading and Study Skills. Additionally, enrollment in all College Prep classes was limited to no more than 20 students. As a part of the upcoming five-year program review, instituting mandatory study hours for Study Skills students will be investigated as will the benefits of adjusting enrollment requirements to require any student enrolled in College Prep English (ENGL 1412) or College Prep Reading (READ 2409) to be enrolled in Study Skills

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