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U.S. energy in 2024: production, consumption and the limits of national statistics

SYNTHETIC TEACHING EXERCISE — NOT A STUDENT SUBMISSION OR A RESEARCH PUBLICATION. This is one of three staged versions of a fictional assignment. Some versions deliberately contain errors. Use the separate answer key before relying on any claim. All versions were prepared with AI assistance for this exercise; the simulated student record is fictional.

P01. An energy review needs to distinguish output from demand. Biofuels, wind, and solar production each set records in 2024, contributing to record total renewable energy production in the United States. These national observations provide a starting point for a fictional campus committee, but they do not tell the committee how much electricity its buildings require or what an individual project would cost.

P02. Total demand provides a different perspective. Energy consumption in the United States totaled 94.2 quads in 2024, remaining below the peak of 99.0 quads set in 2007. (EIA, 2025b, consumption discussion). Comparing totals across years is useful for describing the scale of the national system. A local decision would still require measurements of local energy use.

P03. The long historical view also matters. Earlier uses of coal included several purposes that are no longer common, such as in stoves for household heating and in engines for trains and ships (EIA, 2025c, historical discussion). A change in the way an energy source is used can alter the questions a policy analyst needs to ask.

P04. The EIA production article establishes that solar energy supplied 25% of all U.S. energy production in 2024 (EIA, 2025a, renewable production discussion). This percentage is relevant when considering the relative contribution of solar energy to the national system.

P05. A national historical overview places fossil fuels at 82% of total U.S. energy consumption in 2024 (U.S. Department of Energy, n.d., Balancing). Before applying a national figure to a particular building, the

committee should identify the units and population behind the figure.

P06. Table 1. Selected U.S. primary energy consumption figures for 2024, in quadrillion British thermal units (EIA, 2025b, consumption discussion).

Petroleum: 35.3

Natural gas: 34.2

The table shows that natural gas exceeded petroleum by 1.1 quads. The figures describe total national primary energy consumption, not the fuel mix of campus electricity.

P07. Simulated student declaration: No generative AI was used in preparing this assignment.

P08. The committee could first rank potential investments according to the characteristics of individual buildings. It could then compare annual demand and maintenance needs before selecting a pilot. A staged investment would allow the committee to review observations from a small project before making commitments across the campus.

P09. The U.S. Department of Energy (n.d., Balancing) explains, “A temporary drop in generation might need to be compensated by ramping up other generators, by reducing load, or by tapping stored energy.” This observation concerns short-term balancing of electricity supply and demand. It does not establish a particular investment cost or guarantee that every campus has the same options. A national energy review should preserve this distinction.

References (shared by all versions; simplified author–date style with descriptive locators)

U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). (2025a, June 9). In 2024, the United States produced more energy than ever before. https://www.eia.gov/Todayinenergy/detail.php?id=65445

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U.S. Department of Energy. (n.d.). Solar Grid Planning and Operation Basics. https://www.energy.gov/cmei/systems/solar-grid-planning-and-operation-basics (accessed November 27, 2026).

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