

## AY 2017-2018 Assessment

### Program – Louisiana Scholars' College

**College: Arts and Sciences**

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**Northwestern Mission.** Northwestern State University is a responsive, Student-oriented institution that is committed to the creation, dissemination, and acquisition of knowledge through teaching, research, and service. The University maintains as its highest priority excellence in teaching in graduate and undergraduate programs. Northwestern State University prepares its Students to become productive members of society and promotes economic development and improvements in the quality of life of the citizens in its region.

**College of Arts and Sciences' Mission.** College of Arts and Sciences' Mission. The College of Arts & Sciences, the largest college at Northwestern State University, is a diverse community of scholars, teachers, and students, working collaboratively to acquire, create, and disseminate knowledge through transformational, high-impact experiential learning practices, research, and service. The College strives to produce graduates who are productive members of society equipped with the capability to promote economic and social development and improve the overall quality of life in the region. The College provides an unequalled undergraduate education in the social and behavioral sciences, English, communication, journalism, media arts, biological and physical sciences, and the creative and performing arts, and at the graduate level in the creative and performing arts, English, TESOL, and Homeland Security. Uniquely, the College houses the Louisiana Scholars' College (the State's designated Honors College), the Louisiana Folklife Center, and the Creole Center, demonstrating its commitment to community service, research, and preservation of Louisiana's precious resources.

**Louisiana Scholars' College Mission Statement:** The College's mission is to provide a quality, customized undergraduate education firmly grounded in the liberal arts and sciences to a diverse population of well-qualified, highly motivated students by rethinking the traditional liberal arts curriculum and developing innovative approaches to honors education.

**Louisiana Scholars' College Purpose:** As an academic unit, the Louisiana Scholars' College is responsible for:

- administering, delivering, and enhancing courses for the honors core curriculum (the Common Curriculum), which replaces the University Core for students in the College.
- administering, setting standards, delivering, and enhancing courses for the Minor in Liberal Arts and the individualized Major in Liberal Arts and its honors concentrations: Fine and Performing Arts; Foreign Languages; Humanities and

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- Social Thought; Philosophy, Politics, and the Law; and Scientific Inquiry.
- collaborating with other departments to offer jointly honors versions of 23 traditional majors, each to include the Common Curriculum, a senior thesis, and honors level major courses, as appropriate, in addition to the required courses in each major.
  - mentoring students individually in the production of the senior thesis.
  - advising all honors students on curricular choices to prepare them for advanced study or employment.

Students completing a concentration in the Major in Liberal Arts use a combination of courses offered in the Scholars' College and approved courses offered in other departments or through study abroad.

Due to the variety of degree options in the College and the flexibility of the Major in Liberal Arts, sample sizes are too small for a meaningful evaluation of Student Learning Outcomes related to specific content imparted in any of these majors. (SLOs related to content in specific joint majors are evaluated in the home departments.) The following assessment evaluates skills-based student learning outcomes common to the Major in Liberal Arts and all of the joint majors administered by the College as demonstrated in courses offered in the College.

**Methodology:** The assessment process includes:

1. evaluation of components of single assignments in courses required of all students in the College;
2. evaluation of the comprehensive final exam in skills-based courses satisfying options in the Common Curriculum;
3. summative evaluation of the Senior Thesis defense;
4. summative evaluation of the Archival Senior Thesis.

**Student Learning Outcomes: Students who successfully complete one of our curricula will be able to...**

### **SLO 1. Demonstrate effective oral communication skills.**

Through Thesis Defense

#### **Measure 1.1. (Direct–Skill/Ability–oral communication)**

Students present oral defenses of their theses, which are assessed using the summative rubric for the department, modified in Spring 2017. The target is for a minimum of 75% of students to earn a rating of “Very Good” or higher.

**Finding:** Target met.

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**Analysis:** In AY16-17, all students were rated for the summative quality of their thesis defenses. For 17 of the 20 students (85%; target met) the defense was rated on average "Very Good" or higher based on the scores received from the first reader, second reader, and the LSC director. It was noted that the scores were unacceptably high. However, students are generally not allowed to defend their theses if they are not expected to do well. Given a choice, most students prefer to continue to work towards an "A" thesis rather than present a "C" thesis (or worse); similarly, most first readers continue to push students to produce "A" work, unless the students indicate that they would prefer to graduate in the current semester with a lower grade. Thus, a high proportion of ratings at the level of "Very Good" or higher is expected.

Since the QEP rubric was new and the summative departmental rating scale had changed to add more categories at the top end, the scales were discussed with departmental and nondepartmental raters to make the interpretation and application of benchmarks for the 2017-2018 assessment more uniform.

To improve presentation skills, thesis students were encouraged to present their work at conferences or Research Day. Eight of 15 spring graduates (53%) and five of 18 juniors (28%) made one or more presentations of their thesis research, compared to 11 of 20 seniors and no juniors in AY 16-17.

All but one member of the 2018 cohort (93.8%) scored at the "Very Good" level or higher averaged over the 3 evaluators (target met). The distribution of ratings was not significantly different from AY 16-17 ( $p = .198$ ). One student earned a single marking of "Good" and an additional student earned three "Good" ratings; the remainder of the ratings were "Very Good" or higher.

**Action - Decision or Recommendation:** The improvement in the thesis presentation from 85% reaching the benchmark in AY 16-17 to 93.8% in AY 2017-18 may be due to conference presentations, especially by several students who admitted being nervous speakers. In AY 18-19, 75% of thesis students will make Research Day or conference presentations of their thesis projects.

As the final summative product of the student's academic career, almost always in the major field of study, the thesis is an ideal measure of a student's ability to complete work at a professional level. In AY 18-19, students enrolled in the final thesis course (SBUS 482T, SFPA 482T, SHUM 482T, or SSCI 482T) but not completing the thesis will be included in the analysis with a rating of "Unsatisfactory." This will result in a more representative measure of student outcomes for this program.

In an effort to continuously improve student learning and to ensure that students are reaching the thesis defense with adequate preparation on the mechanics of oral presentations, in AY 18-19 we will also assess this aspect of the final presentation in SCRT 181W and the 2000-level co-courses. This will allow us to determine whether any additional instruction is needed, and if so, what content needs to be reinforced. A rubric will be used to provide comparable ratings for each presentation.

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### SLO 2. Demonstrate effective written communication skills.

Through Archival Thesis Submission

#### Measure 2.1 (Direct–Skill/Ability–written communication)

Students will submit the archival copies of their written theses which will also be assessed using an established rubric.

The target is for a minimum of 75% of students to earn a rating of “Very Good” or higher.

**Finding:** Target met.

Rating of Archival Copy	
1 <sup>st</sup> Reader	2nd Reader
Superlative	Superlative
Superlative	Superlative
Excellent	Excellent
Very Good	Very Good
Superlative	Excellent
Excellent	Good
Excellent	Superlative
Very Good	Very Good
Very Good	Very Good
Very Good	Very Good
Good	Good
Very Good	Good
Very Good	Excellent
Superlative	Superlative
Superlative	Superlative
Excellent	Superlative

**Analysis:** In AY 16-17, 90% (19 of 21) of the archival theses were rated as “Very Good” or better (target met). It was recommended that the change between the exam copy and archival copy of the thesis be used as an alternative measure of the archival thesis. However, this does not account for students who submit exceptional work at the exam copy level and emphasizes students who submit inadequate work.

As a result of the QEP, several thesis directors adjusted their writing requirements and attention to a specific style guide during AY 17-18. Six seniors (40%) and two juniors from next year’s cohort were members of one of two research groups (in chemistry and in psychology) where issues related to writing according to professional standards and addressing a general audience were discussed systematically.

In AY 17-18, 13 of the 15 students (86.7%) earned an average rating of “Very Good” or higher on the archival submission of their thesis (target met). This was not significantly different from AY 17-18.

**Action - Decision or Recommendation:** The rating “Very Good” indicates a “knowledgeable argument,” but includes difficulty with one of the components expected for a professional work. Therefore, for future assessments we will change the target to 70% earning a rating of at least “Excellent.” (In AY 17-18, this would have resulted in 53.3% of students meeting the “Excellent” standard, compared to the 86.7% that was observed with the “Very Good” standard.)

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In an effort to continuously improve student learning and to ensure that students are reaching the thesis with adequate preparation in the mechanics of scholarly writing, in AY 2018-19 we will also assess this aspect of the term paper in SCRT 181W and the 2000-level co-courses. This will allow us to determine whether any additional instruction is needed, and if so, what content needs to be reinforced. A rubric will be used to provide comparable ratings for each paper.

### **SLO 3. Question, analyze, evaluate, and reconcile conflicting perspectives.**

Course Map: Tied to course syllabus below.

SCTT 1820: Texts and Traditions II: The Shaping of Western Thought

#### **Measure: 3.1. (Direct – knowledge)**

Grades on the T & T II final 2017-18					
A	B	C	D	F	W
12	16	3	0	0	1
38%	50%	9%	0%	0%	3%

The final exam includes an essay relating the perspectives of one or more major figures from the course to modern perspectives.

75% of students will earn an average of a B or better on the final exam in this course.

**Finding:** Target met.

**Analysis:** In AY 16-17, 79% of students earned an average of a B or better in this course. A faculty retirement and subsequent new hire resulted in a change in the content of the lectures in this course in AY 17-18, including a more historical perspective. Five new lectures were added. Also, in response to student feedback, the readings for Galileo and Luther were focused and reduced in length to allow for more in-depth study. Exam questions were adjusted to better reflect the SLOs for this course.

In AY 17-18, 28 of the 32 students assessed (87.5%) earned a grade of B or better on the final exam, significantly higher than AY 16-17 ( $p = .044$ ).

**Action - Decision or Recommendation:** Reducing and focusing the reading assignments in SCTT 1820 and adding lectures from a historical perspective appear to have improved students' abilities to engage more deeply with the primary texts they are reading. During the spring semester of 2018, CRC approved a further revision of SCTT 1810 and 1820 designed to better prepare students to closely examine primary texts, to reduce the amount material covered, and to cover the remaining material at greater depth. As a result, the time periods and specific works included will change in the next assessment period (AY 18-19).

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In addition, in AY 18-19 the assessment will be based solely on the grade on the essay question(s) directly related to “different perspectives.”

### **SLO 4. Demonstrate quantitative and problem-solving skills.**

Course Map: Tied to course syllabus below.

In the core mathematics course Applied Statistics (SSTA 3810-01N, Spring 18), 75% of students will earn a B or better on a comprehensive assessment of their knowledge and skills.

#### **Measure 4.1.a. (Direct – skill/ability)**

The course final is a comprehensive evaluation of basic descriptive statistics, fundamental hypothesis testing, and advanced topics; analyses are completed in Excel. Students choose and perform the appropriate analyses and interpret their results in the context of the problems.

**Finding:** Target met.

**Analysis:** In AY 16-17, the comprehensive assessment scores for Precalculus (SMAT 1820) were below target. (Only 48% of students scored 160/200 or above on the final assessment, compared to a target of 75%.) It was suggested that this was possibly due to both the content of this course as well as the way it was taught. Many students who do not expect to continue with calculus take this course to satisfy half of their mathematics core. Due in part to this mixed audience with different backgrounds, attitudes, and academic needs, this course is a barrier to many students.

It was recommended that all the LSC quantitative core courses be examined in relation to the rest of the curriculum.

Because relatively few students elect to major in mathematics or mathematics education, a new mathematics core was approved for science majors, replacing SMAT 1820, 2810, and 2820 (13 hours). A new core course was developed (SMAT 2010: Applied Calculus 2) to supplement Applied Calculus (SMAT 2000). Neither course requires a prerequisite. Science students and those in specific majors must also take Applied Statistics (SSTA 3810).

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SSTA 3810 Final Exam 2017-18		
score	freq	%
≤ 120	1	4%
121-130	0	0%
131-140	0	0%
141-150	1	4%
151-160	0	0%
161-170	2	8%
171-180	6	24%
181-190	5	20%
191-200	10	40%
total	25	

As part of the assessment of the mathematics core, the comprehensive final assessment in SSTA 3810 was used to measure quantitative skill levels of students completing this course; 92% earned Bs or better on the final. As indicated by the comprehensive final exam, the performance in this core course is significantly better than the performance in SMAT 1820 ( $p < .001$ ).

**Action - Decision or Recommendation:** The AY 17-18 assessment clearly indicates that not all of the mathematics core has the same issue with students from different majors and backgrounds. A significant time lag is introduced when changing core requirements, which must appear in the catalog before

they are implemented. The LSC core changes, as well as SMAT 2010, were approved at the Spring 2018 CRC meeting and will appear in the 2018-19 General Catalog. Freshman science students will be advised to take the Applied Calculus sequence beginning in Fall 2018. Performance will be assessed in SMAT 2010 Spring 2019 to determine what further changes will improve student learning.

### **SLO 5. Identify connections within and between the sciences, mathematics, humanities, and the arts.**

Course Map: Tied to course syllabus below.

SLSC 4000 – Thesis Research Methods

#### **Measure 5.1. (Direct – Knowledge)**

Through the final presentation and proposal, students will be assessed on their ability to formulate connections as stated in the SLO.

75% of students will earn an average of a B or better on this presentation.

**Finding:** Target met.

**Analysis:** In the AY 16-17 assessment, an acceptable number of students (83%) met the target. As part of the Quality Enhancement Program, this course continues to be enriched. In AY 17-18 a lecture/discussion on the differences in evidence and approaches between disciplines was added to SLSC 4000. In addition, since the presentation is relatively brief, the final thesis proposal was added to the assessment measure.

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SLSC 4000/SBUS 4000 Presentation and Proposal		
score	#	freq.
≤ 50%	2	12.5%
51-60%	0	0.0%
61-70%	0	0.0%
71-80%	1	6.3%
81-90%	2	12.5%
91-100%	11	68.8%
total	16	

In the current assessment cycle, a similar proportion of students met the standard, although 2 did not submit a final proposal. Thirteen of 16 of students (81.25%) earned an average of a B or better on the proposal (20 points) and presentation (5 points).

**Action - Decision or Recommendation:** In AY 2018-19 a reflection component on the interconnectedness of scholarship across the disciplines will be added to SLSC 4000 to further drive improvement in student learning, and provide a

better measure of this SLO. The QEP emphasizes the importance of reflection for enhancing both the recognition of learning and depth of learning by students in experiential projects.

A second assessment of this SLO will be added to SCTT 2820 (Texts and Traditions IV) by modifying the summative essay assignment which addresses works from throughout all four courses in the Texts and Traditions sequence. The essay prompt will explicitly include making connections within and between the sciences, mathematics, humanities, and the arts and students will be assessed on the quality of their arguments in making these connections.

### Comprehensive summary of key evidence of improvement based on analysis of results:

1. **Statistically significant improvements were found in SLO3 and SLO4.** For the other three SLOs, student outcomes were comparable to AY 16-17.
2. **The targets were met for each SLO.** To help us improve, targets were adjusted to be more aspirational or measures were adjusted to be more inclusive or more focused for AY 18-19.

### Curricular and instructional changes in AY 2017-18

- Special emphasis was placed on making outside research presentations of thesis research. Presenters received individual mentoring on the content and style of their posters or oral presentations.
- Writing and presentation instruction was conveyed in research groups when mentors had more than one thesis student in a particular discipline.
- Content, assignments, and approach were altered in SCTT 1820, based on student and faculty feedback.
- LSC mathematics core courses and requirements were reviewed, revised, and

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approved for AY 18-19 to resolve issues with theoretical versus applied approaches for a variety of curricula.

- New content on evidence and approaches to scholarship across disciplines was added to SLSC/SBUS 4000.

### **Plan of action moving forward.**

- Further major curricular changes were approved this year and will be implemented in AY 18-19, affecting SLO 3, 4, and 5. Assessments in AY 18-19 will tell us the effectiveness of changes to the Texts and Traditions sequence and the mathematics core requirements
- Continued refinements to the QEP assessments and courses will affect SLO 1, 2, and 5.
- Second assessments of SLO 1, 2, 4, and 5 will be added in AY 18-19. This will provide both an early and later measurement of these SLOs.