

Assessment Cycle 2018-2019¹

English Master's Program

College: Arts and Sciences

Prepared by: J. Ereck Jarvis,

Date: May 29, 2019

Approved by: Greg Handel

Date: June 11, 2019

Northwestern State University 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.

Graduate School Mission: Northwestern State University's Graduate School maintains as its mission and purpose to develop, provide, and support innovative, responsive, and accessible graduate programs of the highest quality. The Graduate School encourages mastery of disciplinary literature, innovative research, and professional development and practice opportunities. It further supports research by members of its scholarly community. The Graduate School is a source of intellectual capital for the University and contributes to the public welfare of the region, state, and nation.

Department of English, Foreign Language, And Cultural Studies Mission:

The Department of English, Foreign Languages and Cultural Studies is a dynamic, student-oriented program preparing students to achieve in diverse fields. The Department cultivates innovative, responsive, and accessible education of the highest level. We provide versatility through a range of digital literacies; our students build creative, cultural, critical, linguistic, and compositional skills—all in a contemporary digital context. Dedicated to preparing students to thrive in an ever-changing cultural and workplace environment, we support research, innovation, experiential learning, and creative endeavors by students and faculty.

English Master's Degree Program Mission: The Graduate Program of the Department of English, Foreign Languages and Cultural Studies is a dynamic, student-oriented program focused on rigorously preparing students to achieve in diverse fields. The English M.A. degree focuses on developing, providing, and supporting forward thinking, responsive, and accessible graduate education of the highest level. Through concentrations in Folklife and Southern Culture, Literature, TESOL, Writing and Linguistics, the Graduate Program encourages a mastery of discipline-specific literature, thoughtful research, professional development, and cross-curricular innovation as members of an engaged scholarly community. Offering its students access to creative, critical, and compositional skills and experiences, the Graduate Program provides invaluable versatility in a rapidly changing world.

Assessment Cycle 2018-2019₂

Methodology:

1. Assessment tools are completed by Graduate Faculty in English and returned to the Coordinator of Graduate Studies in English the week of Thesis defenses each term (Summer, Fall, and Spring for each reporting cycle);
2. The Coordinator of Graduate Studies in English assembles, collates, and analyzes the data;
3. Results from the assessments are discussed with Graduate Faculty in English;
4. The Coordinator of Graduate Studies in English, in consultation with the Department Head and Graduate Faculty, will propose an action plan (if there are needed changes to measurable outcomes, assessment tools, and/or curricula or program) in response to assessment findings;
5. The program will implement the action plan in the next assessment reporting cycle.

Student Learning Outcomes.

SLO 1. Students will employ creative thinking, innovation, and creative inquiry.

Measure 1 (Direct—Student Artifact)

Each of the five concentrations in the M.A. program in English offers two options for degree completion:

Thesis Option: Students choosing to write a thesis as the culminating project for their degree will enroll in 6 hours of ENGL 5980: Thesis. A fully approved thesis proposal must be on file in the Department and the Graduate School prior to registration for thesis hours. Thesis students must successfully defend the thesis prior to graduation. Thesis students complete 24 hours of course work (8 classes) and 6 hours of thesis, ENGL 5980, in which the thesis will be written and defended.

Papers-in-lieu Option: Students choosing to write papers-in-lieu as their culminating project for their degree must enroll in 3 hours of ENGL 6950: Research Problems. An overview of the papers must be created in consultation with the project director prior to registration for research hours. The papers must be approved by the student's director and submitted to the Dean of the Graduate School. PIL students complete 27 hours of course work (9 classes) and 3 hours of Research Problems, ENGL 6950, in which two research papers-in-lieu of thesis will be written and submitted.

The attached rubric describes in detail the measurable outcomes for the degree completion options and the assessment columns for each outcome.

Assessment Cycle 2018-2019

All students will achieve an average of 4.5 or higher on the rubric for critical inquiry: “takes a reasoned approach to the topic, builds from an adequately-defined argument and clear thesis, and makes an acceptable contribution to the field of study.”

Finding: Target Met

AY 2018-2019: Target was met, and cohort achieved an arithmetic mean score of 4.625 on the rubric for critical inquiry.

Analysis: In AY 2017-2018, the target of 3.5 was met, as the 21 students who completed their extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 4.40 on the rubric for employment of creative thinking, innovation, and critical inquiry. Nevertheless, the mean score for Measure 1 was the lowest of the four measures in AY 2017-2018. In accordance with the plan of action from 2017-2018, graduate faculty participated in professional training regarding SLO 1 in Fall 2018. Furthermore, the curriculum of English 5800 was refined: new assignments require students to identify, discuss, and reflect upon models of innovative critical inquiry. Additionally, the more rigorous target of 4.5 was established to maximize the benefit of assessment in in AY 2018-2019.

In AY 2018-19, the newly established target was met, as the eight students who completed their extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 4.625. Because the assessed group of eight students exceeded the target for AY 2018-19, more rigorous criteria should be established for evaluating and measuring SLO 1.

Furthermore, this score was one of the two lowest of the measures in AY 2018-19, demonstrating that it warrants continued active revision of extant curriculum.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the 2018-2019 results, in AY 2019-2020, the Graduate Program in English will drive continuous improvement through revision to the rubric used to measure SLO 1 and through additional curricular revision to English 5800. English 5800 will be further refined: a new assignment will provide students with practice and reflection on proposal composition. The assignment will teach approaches that are transferrable to all English graduate courses, that foreground the importance of original critical inquiry, and that demonstrate how to develop original critical inquiry through research design. More significantly, the scale used to evaluate extended, research-based writing projects and to measure all SLOs for the Graduate Program in English will be re-scaled on the rubric from 5 to 10 points. The goal of this change is to capture more nuance in the assessment of SLOs. Additionally, the language of the rubric will be revised to feature more concrete and specific terminology in order to diminish subjective interpretation of the instrument and to raise the standards of measurement. For instance, the highest scores will be earned for critical inquiry and innovation on par with peer-reviewed journals appropriate to the field of work. On the 10-point rubric, the AY 2019-20 target for this measure, newly defined by more rigorous and more specific language on the rubric, will be set at 9.0.

Assessment Cycle 2018-2019⁴

SLO 2. Students will demonstrate a command of pertinent critical assumptions, methodologies, and practices in their chosen concentration.

Measure 2 (Direct—Student Artifact)

Each of the five concentrations in the M.A. program in English offers two options for degree completion:

Thesis Option: Students choosing to write a thesis as the culminating project for their degree will enroll in 6 hours of ENGL 5980: Thesis. A fully approved thesis proposal must be on file in the Department and the Graduate School prior to registration for thesis hours. Thesis students must successfully defend the thesis prior to graduation. Thesis students complete 24 hours of course work (8 classes) and 6 hours of thesis, ENGL 5980, in which the thesis will be written and defended.

Papers-in-lieu Option: Students choosing to write papers-in-lieu as their culminating project for their degree must enroll in 3 hours of ENGL 6950: Research Problems. An overview of the papers must be created in consultation with the project director prior to registration for research hours. The papers must be approved by the student's director and submitted to the Dean of the Graduate School. PIL students complete 27 hours of course work (9 classes) and 3 hours of Research Problems, ENGL 6950, in which two research papers-in-lieu of thesis will be written and submitted.

The attached rubric describes in detail the measurable outcomes for the degree completion options and the assessment columns for each outcome.

All students will achieve an average of 4.5 or higher on the rubric: “[s]ituates the project within a particular theoretical framework, provides some rationale for that approach, and proceeds through related literary, critical, or theoretical methodologies.”

Finding: Target Met

AY 2018-2019: Target was met, and cohort achieved an arithmetic mean score of 4.75 on the rubric for critical methodologies and practices.

Analysis: In AY 2017-2018, the target was met, as the 21 students who completed their extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 4.45 on the rubric for employment of critical methodologies and practices. In accordance with the plan of action from 2017-2018, English 5800 was revised to allow focus on concentration-specific research methods while at the same time providing students with introductions to and experience of working with theoretical frameworks that are applicable within all concentrations. Furthermore, the more rigorous target of 4.5 was established to maximize the benefit of assessment in in AY 2018-2019.

In AY 2018-2019, the target continued to be met despite the revised target being set a full point above the previous AY's target: the eight students who completed their

Assessment Cycle 2018-2019⁵

extended, research-based writing projects scored an arithmetic mean of 4.75 on the rubric for critical methodologies and practices. As the measurement target for SLO 2 has been met and exceeded consistently since AY 2016-17, more rigorous criteria should be established for evaluating and measuring it.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the 2018-2019 results, in 2019-2020, the Graduate Program in English will drive continuous improvement through revising the rubric used to measure SLO 2. The scale used to evaluate extended, research-based writing projects and to measure all SLOs for the Graduate Program in English will be re-scaled on the rubric from 5 to 10 points. The goal of this change is to capture more nuance in the assessment of SLOs. Additionally, the language of the rubric will be revised to feature more concrete and specific language; this seeks to diminish subjective interpretation of the instrument and, more importantly, set a higher target for SLO 2. For instance, regarding SLO 2, the highest scores will be earned for critical methodologies and practices thoroughly theorized or explicitly articulated in the writing project. Highest scores will be earned for methods and practices that meet professional and publishable standards within the field of work appropriate to the project. On the 10-point rubric, the AY 2019-20 target for this measure, newly defined by more rigorous and more specific language on the rubric, will be set at 9.0.

SLO 3. Students will conduct, analyze, and synthesize relevant research within their English concentration to enter the scholarly conversation as a peer.

Measure 3 (Direct—Student Artifact)

Each of the five concentrations in the M.A. program in English offers two options for degree completion:

Thesis Option: Students choosing to write a thesis as the culminating project for their degree will enroll in 6 hours of ENGL 5980: Thesis. A fully approved thesis proposal must be on file in the Department and the Graduate School prior to registration for thesis hours. Thesis students must successfully defend the thesis prior to graduation. Thesis students complete 24 hours of course work (8 classes) and 6 hours of thesis, ENGL 5980, in which the thesis will be written and defended.

Papers-in-lieu Option: Students choosing to write papers-in-lieu as their culminating project for their degree must enroll in 3 hours of ENGL 6950: Research Problems. An overview of the papers must be created in consultation with the project director prior to registration for research hours. The papers must be approved by the student's director and submitted to the Dean of the Graduate School. PIL students complete 27 hours of course work (9 classes) and 3 hours of Research Problems, ENGL 6950, in which two research papers-in-lieu of thesis will be written and submitted.

The attached rubric describes in detail the measurable outcomes for the degree completion options and the assessment columns for each outcome.

Assessment Cycle 2018-2019⁶

All students will achieve an average of 4.75 or higher on the rubric: “locates the project within an academic context through a review of literature that presents an analysis and synthesis of significant and relevant research and suggests how the project fits into and contributes to an ongoing academic conversation.”

Finding: Target Not Met

AY 2018-2019: Target was not met, with cohort receiving an arithmetic score of 4.625 on the rubric for relevant research.

Analysis: In AY 2017-18, the target was met, as the 21 students who completed their extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 4.50. In accordance with the plan of action from 2017-2018, a more rigorous target of 4.75 was established to maximize the benefit of assessment in in AY 2018-2019.

In 2018-2019, the target was not met, as the eight students who completed an extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 4.625. It is important to note that, although the cohort did not meet the target, the mean score for AY 2018-19 was higher by 0.125 than that of AY 2017-18, demonstrating evidence of improvement despite failure to meet the established goal. This improvement indicates that no detriment is likely to follow from following procedure parallel to those planned for other measures: alteration of the rubric to feature more specific language.

As the only target not met in the AY 2018-19 assessment, the results warrant active revision and addition to the current curriculum, particularly to re-engage students with lessons of English 5800 (taken in their first semester of the program) as they write a proposal and otherwise develop the extended, research-based writing project that constitutes the degree’s completion project.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the 2018-2019 results, in 2019-2020, the Graduate Program in English will supplement and revise its curriculum as well as revise the design and language of its assessment rubric in order to drive continuous improvement. English 5800 will be further refined: an existing assignment will be revised and expanded to provide students with practice and reflection regarding development of a literature review. Students will be asked to assess the strengths of model literature reviews and then to articulate how they can develop such strengths in their own work. Furthermore, the English Graduate faculty has undertaken the development of a supplement to its current curriculum. This new component is intended to better support students in the development of their extended, research-based writing projects at the proposal stage. Students develop proposals and plans for these projects in the semester before they enroll in the credit hours that support the completion of the project. As such, they often operate alone and without sufficient guidance to design and propose an optimal extended, research-based writing project. Students in the proposal stage of their completion projects will receive frameworks for designing both their proposals and their research. These guidelines will be structured so as to reiterate lessons from English 5800 regarding the review of existing research and synthesis of

Assessment Cycle 2018-20197

secondary research with emphasis on articulating how the project contributes to an ongoing research-based conversation. Finally, the rubric for assessment will be revised in the following ways. The scale used to evaluate extended, research-based writing projects and to measure all SLOs for the Graduate Program in English will be refigured on the rubric from 5 to 10 points. The goal of this change is to capture more nuance in the assessment of SLOs. Additionally, the language of the rubric will be revised to feature more concrete and specific language. this revision is intended to diminish subjective interpretation of the instrument and to increase the rigor with which the SLO is measured. For instance, regarding SLO 3, the highest scores will be earned for relevant research that draws on six or more book-length studies and ten or more article-length pieces of research, all published in the last decade. Additionally, highest scores will be earned for synthesis and critical analysis of original research that meets standards for peer-reviewed publication in the appropriate field. On the 10-point rubric, the AY 2019-20 target for this measure, newly defined by more rigorous and more specific language on the rubric, will be set at 9.25.

SLO 4. Students will practice sophisticated writing skills appropriate to stylistic conventions and genre expectations within their chosen MA concentration.

Measure 4 (Direct—Student Artifact)

Each of the five concentrations in the M.A. program in English offers two options for degree completion:

Thesis Option: Students choosing to write a thesis as the culminating project for their degree will enroll in 6 hours of ENGL 5980: Thesis. A fully approved thesis proposal must be on file in the Department and the Graduate School prior to registration for thesis hours. Thesis students must successfully defend the thesis prior to graduation. Thesis students complete 24 hours of course work (8 classes) and 6 hours of thesis, ENGL 5980, in which the thesis will be written and defended.

Papers-in-lieu Option: Students choosing to write papers-in-lieu as their culminating project for their degree must enroll in 3 hours of ENGL 6950: Research Problems. An overview of the papers must be created in consultation with the project director prior to registration for research hours. The papers must be approved by the student's director and submitted to the Dean of the Graduate School. PIL students complete 27 hours of course work (9 classes) and 3 hours of Research Problems, ENGL 6950, in which two research papers-in-lieu of thesis will be written and submitted.

The attached rubric describes in detail the measurable outcomes for the degree completion options and the assessment columns for each outcome.

All students will achieve an average of 4.75 or higher on the rubric: "follows conventions for academic written English and communicates essential information coherently;

Assessment Cycle 2018-2019

evidences a sense of audience; organized with transitions and flow for a cohesive argument; correct formatting and citation according to selected style guide.”

Finding: Target Met

AY 2018-2019: Target was met, and cohort achieved an arithmetic mean score of 4.875 on the rubric for writing skills.

Analysis: In AY 2017-18, the target was met, as the 21 students who completed their extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 4.66. In accordance with the plan of action from 2017-2018, the more rigorous target of 4.75 was established to maximize the benefit of assessment in in AY 2018-2019.

In AY 2018-19, the target continued to be met, as the eight students who completed their extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 4.875. Analysis of these findings demonstrates the success of English 5800's redesign to better understand the writing-based conventions and standards of academic composition generally and that of each student's respective concentration. As the measurement target for SLO 4 has been met and exceeded consistently since AY 2016-17—having been exceeded for the current AY despite the target having been raised more than a full point since AY 2017-18— more rigorous criteria should be established for evaluating and measuring SLO 4.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the 2018-2019 results, in 2019-2020, the Graduate Program in English will seek to drive continuous improvement through revisions to the rubric used to measure SLO 4. The scale used to evaluate extended, research-based writing projects and to measure all SLOs for the Graduate Program in English will be refigured on the rubric from 5 to 10 points. The goal of this change is to capture more nuance in the assessment of SLOs. Additionally, the language of the rubric will be revised to feature more concrete and specific language; this revision is intended to diminish subjective interpretation of the instrument and, more importantly, to increase the expectations of student performance regarding SLO 4. For instance, the highest scores for SLO 4 will be earned for demonstration of writing skills not that “follow conventions for academic writing” but rather than exemplify standards of composition as modelled by peer-reviewed publications in the field appropriate to the project. On the 10-point rubric, the AY 2019-20 target for this measure, newly defined by more rigorous and more specific language on the rubric, will be set at 9.5.

Comprehensive summary of key evidence of improvements based on analysis of results.

- Implemented in AY 2018-19, a new English 5800 assignment requiring student analysis of and reflection on models of critical inquiry correlates with achievement of increased target measurement for SLO 1.

Assessment Cycle 2018-2019

- Fall 2018 faculty training regarding critical inquiry further contributed to continuing improvement regarding critical analysis and the achievement of an increased target measurement for SLO 1.
- Course-wide revision of ENGL 5800 curriculum to allow persistent focus on concentration-specific research methods supported student achievement of increased target for Measure 2 in AY 2018-2019. Furthermore, these curricular changes supported an increase in median arithmetic mean score for Measure 3 between AY 2017-2018 and AY 2018-2019, despite the latter cohort's not meeting the increased target.
- An additional assignment in English 5800 requiring students to analyze model literature reviews through application of Kenneth Burke's metaphor of conversational epistemology correlates with increased mean score for Measure 3, although the cohort did not meet the increased target set for that measure in AY 2018-2019.
- An additional assignment in English 5800 requiring students to identify and articulate genre- and discipline-specific conventions of academic writing facilitated ongoing improvement regarding SLO 4 as demonstrated by achievement of increased target for Measure 4.

Plan of action moving forward.

Dedication to persistent improvement has prompted the English Graduate faculty to revise the *Rubric for Extended, Research-Based Writing Project* employed to measure our program's SLOs. The rubric will be refined and expanded as follows:

- The current five-point scale for each measure will be increased to ten points in order to capture more nuance in evaluation of student performance regarding all SLOs.
- The language of the rubric regarding each measure will be refined to include more specific, more objective, and more rigorous standards.

The expansion of the measurement scale and increased rigor in definition of success for each SLO has led to establishment of more challenging targets for all SLOs, with each target set based on comparison of results from AY 2016-17, AY 2017-19, and AY 2018-19.

Lower scores for SLO 1 and, particularly, SLO 3, whose measure target was not met for AY 2018-19, have led faculty to the following curricular refinements to our program's required course English 5800:

- A new assignment will provide students with practice and reflection regarding the composition of proposals. This addition will attune students more thoroughly to the impact of project and research design on creative and effective critical inquiry.
- An existing assignment will be expanded to allow students to practice and reflect on the development of a literature review.

Assessment Cycle 2018-2019¹⁰

Because the assessment process indicates need for particular attention regarding SLO 3, the English Graduate faculty is developing a supplement to its current curriculum: students will utilize frameworks and guidelines to support them in the development stage of their extended, research-based writing projects— an early phase of the completion project which past students typically completed with little guidance as the relationship of project-writer and project-advisor is formalized following this stage of project design, development, and composition.

Furthermore, newly regular (monthly) meetings of the English Graduate faculty in AY 2018-19 demonstrated great benefit to the program, particularly regarding the following: attention to our measures, consideration of how individual courses address our SLOs, and re-assessment of how our curriculum could be augmented and refined to better support students' understanding and performance regarding our SLOs. The supplement to current curriculum described immediately above is a direct result of this increased engagement and interaction of English Graduate faculty. As such, the English Graduate faculty plans to continue its monthly meetings and aims to further emphasize the benefits of sharing challenges and reflecting collectively with the conviction that these activities foster the ongoing development of our curriculum and our students.

Assessment Cycle 2018-2019¹¹

STUDENT NAME _____ TERM OF COMPLETION _____

Rubric for Extended, Research-Based Writing Project

Outcome	5	4	3	2	1
Employ creative thinking, innovation, & critical inquiry	Takes an innovative approach to the topic, builds from a well-defined argument and challenging thesis, and makes an original and significant contribution to the field of study	Takes an interesting approach to the topic, builds from a clearly-defined argument and clear thesis, and makes an original contribution to the field of study	Takes a reasoned approach to the topic, builds from an adequately-defined argument and thesis, and makes an acceptable contribution to the field of study	Takes a haphazard, if recognizable, approach to the topic, lacks a clear argument and defined thesis, and does not make a recognizable contribution to the field of study	Fails to take a recognizable approach to an ill-defined topic, makes no recognizable argument, and does not make a recognizable contribution to the field of study
Demonstrate a command of pertinent critical assumptions, methodologies, & practices	Situates the project within a well-defined theoretical framework, provides a compelling rationale for that approach, and proceeds through clearly-related literary, critical, or theoretical methodologies	Situates the project within a defined critical theoretical framework, provides a rationale for that approach, and proceeds through related literary, critical, or theoretical methodologies	Situates the project within a particular theoretical framework, provides some rationale for that approach, and proceeds through related literary, critical, or theoretical methodologies	Situates the project within a theoretical framework that is ill-defined, provides a limited rationale for that approach, and proceeds haphazardly through muddled methodologies	Lacks a recognizable theoretical framework and proceeds without identifiable methodology
Conduct, analyze, & synthesize relevant research	Locates the project within a clearly-defined academic context through a thorough review of literature that	Locates the project within a defined academic context through a developed review of literature that presents a	Locates the project within an academic context through a review of literature that presents an analysis and synthesis of	Locates the project with some academic context through an undeveloped review of literature that lacks critical	Little or no academic context due to a lack of or extremely limited literature review that lacks analysis, fails to

Assessment Cycle 2018-2019¹²

	presents a critical analysis and synthesis of significant and relevant research and makes evident how the project fits into and contributes to an ongoing academic conversation	critical analysis and synthesis of significant and relevant research and makes known how the project fits into and contributes to an ongoing academic conversation	significant research and suggests how the project fits into and contributes to an ongoing academic conversation	analysis or fails to discuss some significant research; only hints at how the project fits into and contributes to an ongoing academic conversation	address significant research, and draws little connection between the project and the ongoing academic conversation
Practice sophisticated writing skills appropriate to stylistic conventions & genre expectations	Follows conventions for academic written English and communicates essential information with clarity, precision, and coherence; evidences a strong sense of audience and tone; well-organized with appropriate transitions and logical flow for a cohesive argument; correct formatting and citation according to selected style guide	Follows conventions for academic written English and communicates essential information clearly and coherently; evidences a sense of audience and tone; organized with appropriate transitions and logical flow for a cohesive argument; correct formatting and citation according to selected style guide	Follows conventions for academic written English and communicates essential information coherently; evidences a sense of audience; organized with transitions and flow for a cohesive argument; correct formatting and citation according to selected style guide	Fails to meet some conventions for academic written English so that communication is at times unclear, imprecise, or incoherent at times; lacks logical organization, transitions, and cohesion; incorrect formatting and citation according to selected style guide	Fails to meet conventions for academic written English so that communication is unclear, imprecise, or incoherent at times; lacks logical organization and cohesion; incorrect formatting and citation according to selected style guide