

## Assessment Cycle AY 2018-2019

### Louisiana Scholars' College

**College: Arts and Sciences**

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**Date: 2 July 2019**

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**Date: 2 July 2019**

**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.** 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

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in Liberal Arts and the individualized Major in Liberal Arts and its honors concentrations: Fine and Performing Arts; Foreign Languages; Humanities and Social Thought; Philosophy, Politics, and Economics; and Scientific Inquiry.

- collaborating with other departments to offer jointly honors versions of 26 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:

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

Through first semester presentation and Thesis Defense.

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

Students make oral presentations of their term papers in SCRT 181w and the 2000-level co-classes, which are assessed using the AACU *Oral Communication* rubric. The target is for a minimum of 75% of students to earn an average rating of 3 or higher. AY 2018-2019 is the first year we have assessed this class.

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**Finding:** Target not met.

**Analysis:** All students take SCRT 181W or a 2000-level version in their first semester and must present their term paper orally. (Students with one of the following criteria enroll in the 2000-level course: dual enrollment (DE), Advanced Placement (AP), or International Baccalaureate (IB) credit; or an ACT English subscore of 31 or higher. The classes meet together and receive the same instruction.) Based on a 4-point rubric, 75% or more of students scored a 3 or 4 on the subscales *Organization* (76.5%) and *Central Message* (79.4%). However, overall, only 50.0% averaged a 3 or above over the 5 subscales. The worst performance was on the *Supporting Materials* and *Language* subscales, with only 64.7% earning a 3 or 4 for their presentation.

Oral Communication Scores by Course					
subscale	SCRT 181W		S***2000		p
	M	SD	M	SD	
Organization	2.50	0.756	3.15	0.732	0.027*
Language	2.25	0.463	3.00	0.693	0.001
Delivery	2.38	0.518	3.08	0.796	0.005
Support	2.13	0.835	3.04	0.871	0.010*
Central Message	2.25	0.463	3.35	0.562	< .001

\*not significant (1-tailed t-test)

In AY 2018-2019, students enrolled in the 2000 level course ( $N = 26$ ) performed significantly better than those enrolled in SCRT 181W ( $N = 8$ ) on three of the five subscales (one-tailed independent samples  $t$ -test with the Bonferroni correction, i.e.,  $p < .01$ ).

**Decision:** Since the main emphasis of this course is on critical reading as well as writing, oral presentation skills may not be receiving enough emphasis. Written materials on making a scholarly presentation will be prepared to share in all sections to help students better prepare for their presentations. In particular, students will be instructed on how to provide supporting evidence and cite scholarly sources in an oral presentation.

As students move through the curriculum, this assessment will be paired with the Thesis Defense assessment to determine growth in oral communication skills.

### Measure 1.2. (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.

**Analysis:** In AY 2017-2018, all but one member of the 2017-2018 cohort (93.8%) scored at the “Very Good” level or higher averaged over the 3 evaluators (target met). 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.

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All students are rated for the summative quality of their thesis defenses: *unsatisfactory*, *satisfactory*, *good*, *very good*, *excellent*, or *superlative*. Each rating is based on specific levels of performance, with examples given in a departmental rubric. Each defense is rated by the first and second readers as well as the Director of the College.

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. To better assess the degree to which the traditional methods, research, and writing sequence is working in a timely fashion, in AY 2018-2019, students enrolled in the final thesis course (SBUS 482T, SFPA 482T, SHUM 482T, or SSCI 482T) but not completing the thesis were included in the analysis with a rating of *Unsatisfactory*.

Fifteen members of the AY 2018-2019 cohort (83%) earned a rating of *Very Good* or higher, averaged over the three raters. One student did not complete the written document or defend it, and thus was rated *Unsatisfactory*. One student received two *Good* ratings and a *Satisfactory*; a second received two *Good* ratings and a *Very Good*. This proportion was not significantly different from AY 2017-2018.

To improve presentation skills, thesis students were encouraged to present their work at conferences or Research Day. Ten of 18 seniors (56%) and two of 27 juniors (3.7%) made one or more presentations of their thesis research, compared to 8 of 15 seniors and 5 of 18 juniors in AY 2017-2018. This fell below the target of 75% participation of seniors.

**Decision:** Based on the analysis of the 2018-2019 data, and in an effort to continuously improve student learning and to ensure that students are completing the thesis defense with adequate preparation on the mechanics of oral presentations, in AY 2019-2020 thesis directors will be required to offer to critique a run-through of the student's presentation prior to the defense. This will provide students with feedback on whether their presentations meet expectations while still maintaining the oral examination nature of the defense itself. These run-throughs will allow faculty to determine whether any additional instruction is needed in the future, and if so, what content needs to be reinforced.

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. Although the proportion of students meeting the benchmark dropped from 93.8% in AY 2017-2018 to 83.3% in AY 2018-2019, this difference was not significant.

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

Through first semester term paper and Archival Thesis Submission

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

Students write 4,000 word term papers in SCRT 181w and the 2000-level co-courses, which are assessed using the AACU *Written Communication* rubric. The target is for a minimum of 75% of students to earn an average rating of 3 or higher. This is the first year we have assessed this class.

**Finding:** Target not met.

**Analysis:** Based on a 4-point rubric, only 48.3% of students averaged a 3 or above over the 5 subscales. The best performance was on the *Context of and Purpose for Writing* subscale, where 20 of 29 students (69.0%) scored a 3 or 4. The worst performance was on the *Sources and Evidence* subscale, with only 37.9% earning a 3 or 4. Since the skillful use of textual evidence is essential to writing a scholarly research paper, this represents a serious deficiency in writing skills.

**Decision:** At the end of one semester of writing instruction, students are not performing at the expected level. Since students enrolled in SCRT 181W score significantly lower than those at the 2000 level on the *Context and Purpose* and *Syntax and Mechanics* subscales, it is recommended that instructors meet privately with each SCRT 181W student after the initial topic/introduction assignment for paper 1 to discuss means to improve the introductory passages of their papers and after the completed first assignment is corrected and returned, to discuss individual weaknesses in grammar, syntax, and mechanics. Instructors will keep written notes from these meetings and document improvement or failure to improve on these points in subsequent assignments.

As students move through the curriculum, this assessment will be paired with the Archival Thesis assessment to determine growth in written communication skills.

#### **Measure 2.2 (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 70% of students to earn a rating of “Excellent” or higher.

**Finding:** Target not met.

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**Analysis:** In AY 2017-2018, the target was met. Thirteen (13) of 15 students (86.7%) earned an average rating of “Very Good” or higher on the archival submission of their thesis (target met).

As a result of the QEP, several thesis directors adjusted their writing requirements and attention to a specific style guide during AY 2017-2018. Six seniors (40%) and two juniors from the AY 2018-2019 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 2018-2019, five seniors were in these groups.

In AY 2018-2019, 10 of 18 (55.6%) earned an average rating of “Excellent” or higher on the archival submission of their thesis (target not met). (Fifteen of 18 (83.3%) ranked “Very Good” or better, which was not significantly different from AY 2017-2018.)

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

**Decision:** Raising the target to 70% earning a rating of at least "Excellent" may have contributed to failing to meet the target. However, in AY 2018-2019, many thesis students had difficulty meeting deadlines in the second semester. Since this resulted in a workload problem for the thesis readers, it may have been responsible for some lower ratings; although “professional behavior” and “timeliness” are not part of the summative rating of the archival copy, a student rushing to meet a deadline is less likely to be able to produce the highest quality document. Since such workload crises have a negative effect on faculty productivity and are likely to result either in lower quality feedback to the thesis student or lower quality or less timely feedback to students in other courses, this problem is already being addressed with the 2019-2020 cohort. In addition to stressing time management and meeting deadlines in the thesis methods course, submission deadlines will be moved earlier in the semester for spring 2020.

**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)**

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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 this final exam essay.

**Finding:** Target met.

**Analysis:** In AY 2017-2018, 28 of the 32 students assessed (87.5%) earned a grade of B or better on the final exam.

Exam questions were adjusted to better reflect the SLOs for this course.

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

Passage 4,T & T II final 2018-2020					
10	9	8	7	6	≤ 5
8	1	1	0	0	0
80%	10%	10%	0%	0%	0%

result, the time periods and specific works included changed in AY 2018-2019.

In AY 2018-2019 the assessment was based solely on the grade on the essay question

directly related to “different perspectives.” Only two instructors reported data on the performance of their students on the targeted passage in the final exam. All students met the benchmark. With the exception of two students who stopped attending and thus failed the course, the remaining 25 students earned a course grade of “A.”

**Decision:** The uniformity of scores on this measure makes it difficult to identify direction for improvement. To give instructors more feedback and to allow them to respond within the same cohort, it is recommended that the essay question be administered no later than midterm and that it be assessed via the AACU Value rubric for *Reading*.

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

Course Map: Tied to course syllabi below.

Applied Calculus 1 (SMAT 2000) and Applied Statistics (SSTA 3810-01N)

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

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

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.

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**Finding:** Target met.

**Analysis:** In AY 2017-2018, 92% earned Bs or better on the final. As indicated by the comprehensive final exam, the performance in this core course was significantly better than the performance in SMAT 1820 ( $p < .001$ ).

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).

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. In AY 2018-2019, 79% earned a B or better on the final. This was not significantly different from the AY 2017-2018 results ( $p = .198$ ). Because the scores were so high on the AY 2017-2018 final, the AY 2018-2019 final was reconfigured to include one additional problem on an advanced topic, reducing the points available for elementary topics and possibly lowering the scores somewhat.

**Decision:** Additional formal homework assignments (via WebAssign or Excel handouts) will be designed to improve performance on routine calculations.

### Measure 4.2. (Direct – skill/ability)

In the core mathematics course Applied Calculus 1 (SMAT 2000), 75% of students will earn a B or better on a comprehensive assessment of their knowledge and skills.

**Finding:** Target not met.

**Analysis:** The LSC quantitative core changes, as well as SMAT 2010, were approved at the Spring 2018 CRC meeting and appeared in the 2018-19 General Catalog. Freshman science students were advised to take the Applied Calculus sequence beginning in Fall 2018. Fall 2018 was the first time more than four students had enrolled in SMAT 2000.

Eight of 17 students completing the course (47.1%) scored 80% or higher on the comprehensive final exam. This was comparable to the performance in SMAT 1820 in AY 2017-2018. Of the nine students who did not meet the target, seven (78%) failed to submit one or more homework assignments and six (67%) did not submit one or more

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sample exams. Two students failed to submit three of the four sample exams. Students with the five lowest exam scores had four or more unexcused absences.

**Decision:** The large number of students not submitting homework and sample exams most likely indicates a lack of engagement in the course, but could indicate overconfidence, poor time management skills, or difficulty with one or more concepts. Item analysis for homework assignments and exams will be used to identify specific concepts which require more attention. Students failing to submit homework assignments will be required to schedule and attend a conference with the instructor to identify positive steps to improve their performance. More time will be used to stress effective study habits in mathematics and the number of elementary problems in the homework will be increased. The number of supplementary items, such as sample exams, will be increased, using exams from the AY 2018-2019 class. Predictors of student success and failure, such as standardized test scores and completion of dual enrollment math courses, will be compared to exam scores to determine whether a prerequisite should be added to this course.

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

Course Map: Tied to course syllabus below.

SCTT 2820 – Texts and Traditions IV  
SLSC 4000 – Thesis Research Methods

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

A new assessment of this SLO was added in AY 2018-2019 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 (required of all students). The essay prompt explicitly includes making connections within and between the sciences, mathematics, humanities, and the arts and students were assessed on the quality of their arguments in making these connections, using the AACU Values rubric for *Inquiry and Analysis*.

75% of students will earn an average score of 3.0 or better on this rubric.

**Finding:** Target not met.

**Analysis:** Examining each rubric item individually, between 40% and 50% of students earned at least a 3. The worst performance was on *Topic Selection*, with 45% of students earning a score of 1 (*Identifies a topic that is far too general and wide-ranging as to be manageable and doable*). The highest average score occurred on *Conclusions*, where four students earned a 4 (*States a conclusion that is a logical extrapolation from the inquiry findings*) and six earned a score of 3 (*States a conclusion focused solely on*

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*the inquiry findings. The conclusion arises specifically from and responds specifically to the inquiry findings.)*

**Decision:** Although SLO 5 is emphasized in almost every lecture in the Texts and Traditions sequence, students may need additional guidance on how to make these connections for themselves. It is recommended that an additional assignment be added prior to midterm grades asking students to complete a reflection identifying specific connections between disciplines inherent in the works covered in the first half of the semester. (This assignment may be in terms of a prompt in the discussion sections.) Additional guidance will be given in writing for the final essay in terms of specific expectations for an A level performance.

### Measure 5.2. (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 the presentation and final proposal.

**Finding:** Target not met.

**Analysis:** In AY 2017-18 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. Thirteen of 16 of students (81.25%) earned an average of a B or better on the proposal (20 points) and presentation (5 points); 2 students did not submit a final proposal.

SLSC 4000/SBUS 4000 Presentation and Proposal		
score	#	freq.
< 50%	3	10.7%
50-59%	1	3.6%
60-69%	1	3.6%
70-79%	10	35.7%
80-89%	9	32.1%
90-100%	4	14.3%
total	28	

In AY 2018-2019, only 13 of 28 students (46.4%) earned an average of a B or better on the proposal (18 points) and presentation (5 points); 2 did not submit a final proposal.

**Decision:** Measure 5.2 is too broad. In AY 2019-20, a reflection component on the interconnectedness of scholarship across the disciplines will be added to SLSC/SBUS 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. This reflection will be assessed using the AACU Values rubric for *Inquiry and Analysis*, which will allow us to look for improvement between the sophomore (SCTT 2820) and junior years.

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

1. Student outcomes were statistically similar to AY 2017-18 in SLO1, SLO2, and SLO4. New, more specific measures were introduced for each SLO, with an early and end-of-career measure for SLO1, SLO2, and SLO5. An additional assessment was added to SLO4.
2. The targets were met for SLO3, one measure of SLO1, and one measure of SLO4. To help us improve, targets were adjusted to be more aspirational or measures were adjusted to be more inclusive or more focused for AY 2018-2019. All but SLO3 now has two measures and data is being collected to allow for longitudinal analysis.

### Curricular and instructional changes in AY 2018-19

- Writing and presentation instruction was conveyed in additional research groups when mentors had more than one thesis student in a particular discipline.
- The new configuration of SCTT 1810 and 1820 was taught for the first time. Based on faculty and student feedback, SOR 1010 (Orientation) will be reinstated as a stand-alone course in fall 2019.
- The new configuration of SCTT 2810 and 2820 was approved by CRC and will be taught in AY 2019-2020.
- New LSC mathematics core courses and requirements were instituted for AY 2018-2019 to resolve issues with theoretical versus applied approaches for a variety of curricula. SMAT 2010 was taught for the first time.
- New content on research planning and time management 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 2019-2020, affecting SLO3 and SLO5. Assessments in AY 2019-2020 will tell us the effectiveness of changes to the Texts and Traditions sequence.
- Continued refinements to the QEP assessments and courses will affect SLO 1, 2, and 5.
- Increased uniformity in feedback and intervention in SCRT 181W will be implemented in AY 2019-2020.