

AC 2019-2020 Assessment

Program: English Master's Program

College: Arts and Sciences

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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.

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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 Outcome

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

Measure 1.1 (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.

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All students will achieve an average of 9.0 or higher on the revised rubric for “Ideas”: student “employ[s] creative thinking, innovation, and critical inquiry.”

Findings: Target not met.

Analysis: In AC 2018-19, the target of 4.5 was met, as the eight students who completed their extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 4.625 on the rubric for employment of creative thinking, innovation, and critical inquiry. In accordance with the plan of action from 2018-19, revisions were made to English 5800 to provide students with practice and reflection on proposal composition. Furthermore, the scale used to evaluate extended, research-based writing projects and to measure all SLOs for the Graduate Program in English was revised on the rubric from a 5-point scale to a 10-point scale. New language on the rubric established more rigorous and specific criteria, and the AC 2019-20 target for this measure was set at 9.0.

As a result, in AC 2019-20, the target was not met, as the eight students who completed an extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 7.5. Two of the eight students who completed the degree in AC 2019-20 initiated their MA in English program of study before revisions to ENGL 5800 which have been implemented consistently since AC 2016-17. The six students who completed an extended, research-based writing project and who benefited from ongoing revisions to ENGL 5800 scored significantly higher, an arithmetic mean of 8.33, although this cohort’s score also does not meet the target.

The failure to meet the established goal demonstrated, in part, the effective revision to the rubric for AC 2019-20. For AC 2019-20 assessment, the rubric was rewritten to feature more specific evaluative language and thereby increase the rigor and uniformity of evaluation; additionally, the former 5-point scale was rendered as a 10-points to capture greater nuance in the assessment of SLOs.

Furthermore, this score was the lowest of the measures in AC 2019-20, demonstrating that it requires the most attention and most concentrated and active revision of extant curriculum.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the 2019-20 results, in AC 2020-21 the Graduate Program in English will drive continuous improvement through a professional development session for graduate English faculty and further curricular revision to ENGL 5800. An assignment was added to ENGL 5800 in AC 2019-20 to provide students with practice on proposal composition. This will be redesigned to better foreground reflection. Furthermore, the final assignment in ENGL 5800—a provisional thesis proposal—will be altered to include a component emphasizing reflection on the student’s original critical inquiry. Both curricular changes require students to evaluate their own attempts at original research design and innovative contributions to their respective fields. The reflection will enhance the transferability of these assignments—the student’s ability to apply ENGL 5800 content in other courses. Students’ reflections on their own strengths and weaknesses teaches that development of original critical inquiry is an ongoing process,

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a SLO they develop and hone over the course of their graduate study at NSU. Furthermore, these new assignment components enable each student to chart an original plan for growth and improved practice.

A professional development session for graduate English faculty will offer strategies for teaching innovative and creative research particularly through the design of assignments and the evaluation of student work to foreground innovative analysis and creative thinking. The session will emphasize the importance of students' receiving feedback specific to the originality of their work and how they can strengthen the innovation of their research practices.

On the rubric, the AC 2020-21 target for this measure will be set at 8.25. This target will promote continuous improvement and will adjust the goal for the increased specificity and nuance of the substantially revised rubric first implemented in AC 2019-20.

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

Measure 2.1 (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.

All students will achieve an average of 9.0 or higher on the revised rubric for "Context": student "demonstrate[s] a command of pertinent critical assumptions, methodologies, and practices."

Findings: Target not met.

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Analysis: In AC 2018-19, the target of 4.5 was met, as the eight students who completed their extended, research-based writing projects scored an arithmetic mean of 4.75 on the rubric for critical methodologies and practices. In accordance with the plan of action from AC 2018-19, the scale used to evaluate extended, research-based writing projects and to measure all SLOs for the Graduate Program in English was revised on the rubric from a 5-point scale to a 10-point scale. New language on the rubric established more rigorous and specific criteria, and the AC 2019-20 target for this measure was set at 9.0.

As a result, in AC 2019-2020, the target the target was not met, as the eight students who completed an extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 8.125. Two of the eight students who completed the degree in AC 2019-20 initiated their MA in English program of study before ENGL 5800 revisions, which have been implemented consistently since AC 2016-17. The six students who completed an extended, research-based writing project and who benefited from ongoing revisions to ENGL 5800 scored significantly higher, an arithmetic mean of 9.0, meaning this cohort's scores met the target.

The failure to meet the established goal demonstrated, in part, the effective revision to the rubric for AC 2019-20. For AC 2019-20 assessment, the rubric was rewritten to feature more specific evaluative language and thereby increase the rigor and uniformity of evaluation; additionally, the former 5-point scale was rendered as a 10-points to capture greater nuance in the assessment of SLOs.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2019-20 results, in 2020-2021, the Graduate Program in English will drive continuous improvement through revision of ENGL 5800 curriculum and a professional development session for graduate English faculty. These steps will continue to promote growth and excellence even though the more recent cohort of six students met the target. ENGL 5800 will add a lesson introducing students to specific language on the rubric for extended research-based writing used to assess the graduate program in English, particularly language used to define top scores of 8 through 10. The lesson provides students with concrete terms and strong, clear standards for their own research practice in ENGL 5800 and subsequent coursework, most notably the thesis (ENGL 5890) or papers-in-lieu of thesis (ENGL 6950). A professional development session for English graduate faculty will demonstrate a variety of options through which professors can promote SLO 2 in individual assignments. By not only including but articulating context as a learning objective, individual assignments throughout students' graduate study will reiterate the centrality of gaining and demonstrating a command of pertinent critical assumptions, methodologies, and practices in their research. Explicit practice of effective methods and practices in numerous individual assignments also allows students to build their knowledge and practice of working with pertinent methods.

On the rubric, the AC 2020-21 target for this measure will be set at 9.0. This target will promote continuous improvement and will adjust the goal for the increased specificity and nuance of the substantially revised rubric first implemented in AC 2019-20.

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SLO 3. Research/Discourses: Students will conduct, analyze, synthesize, and contextualize relevant research within their English concentration.

Measure 3.1 (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.

All students will achieve an average of 9.25 or higher on the revised rubric for "Research/Discourses": student "conduct[s], analyze[s], synthesize[s], and contextualize[s] relevant research within their English concentration."

Findings: Target not met.

Analysis: In AC 2018-19, the target of 4.75 was not met, as the eight students who completed an extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 4.625. In accordance with the plan of action from AC 2018-19, ENGL 5800 was revised: an existing assignment was altered and expanded to provide students with practice and reflection regarding development of a literature review. Progress was made in the development of a new component of the English graduate curriculum: frameworks for students in the proposal stage of their completion projects to support and benefit the design of their proposals and research. These frameworks and new feature was not completed or implemented due to disruptions caused by COVID-19 and NSU's shift to online only teaching in Spring 2020. Nevertheless, frameworks were developed to support students' design of their proposals and research. Finally, the scale used to evaluate extended, research-based writing projects and to measure all SLOs for the Graduate Program in English was revised on the rubric from a 5-point scale to a 10-point scale.

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New language on the rubric established more rigorous and specific criteria, and the AC 2019-20 target for this measure was set at 9.25.

As a result, in AC 2019-20, the target the target was not met, as the eight students who completed an extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 7.75. Two of the eight students who completed the degree in AC 2019-20 initiated their MA in English program of study before ENGL 5800 revisions, which have been implemented consistently since AC 2016-17. The six students who completed an extended, research-based writing project and who benefited from ongoing revisions to ENGL 5800 scored significantly higher, an arithmetic mean of 8.83, although this cohort's score also does not meet the target.

The failure to meet the established goal demonstrated, in part, the effective revision to the rubric for AC 2019-20. For AC 2019-20 assessment, the rubric was rewritten to feature more specific evaluative language and thereby increase the rigor and uniformity of evaluation; additionally, the former 5-point scale was rendered as a 10-points to capture greater nuance in the assessment of SLOs.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2019-20 results, in 2020-21, the Graduate Program in English will drive continuous improvement by completing and piloting new frameworks to support students' development of proposals and research design for completion projects. Additionally, the program will present a professional development session for graduate English faculty. The English graduate faculty will continue the development of a supplement to its current curriculum. This new component better supports students in the development of their extended, research-based writing projects at the proposal stages of these projects. 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 reiterate lessons from ENGL 5800 regarding the review of existing research and synthesis of secondary research with emphasis on articulating how the project contributes to an ongoing research-based conversation. A professional development training for English graduate faculty will highlight Eric Hayot's argument that graduate student seminar papers generally do not include a substantive literature review because of the time frame of these assignments. Faculty will learn and share options for teaching literature review in other assignments, and for otherwise teaching students the differences between representing critical conversations in seminar papers and completion projects.

On the rubric, the AC 2020-21 target for this measure will be set at 8.5. This target will promote continuous improvement and will adjust the goal for the increased specificity and nuance of the substantially revised rubric first implemented in AC 2019-20.

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

Measure 4.1 (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.

All students will achieve an average of 9.5 or higher on the revised rubric for "Form": student "practice[s] sophisticated writing skills appropriate to stylistic conventions and genre expectations."

Findings: Target not met.

Analysis: In AC 2018-19, the target of 4.75 was met, as the eight students who completed their extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 4.875. In accordance with the plan of action from AC 2018-19, the scale used to evaluate extended, research-based writing projects and to measure all SLOs for the Graduate Program in English was revised on the rubric from a 5-point scale to a 10-point scale. New language on the rubric established more rigorous and specific criteria, and the AC 2019-20 target for this measure was set at 9.5.

As a result, in AC 2019-20, the target the target was not met, as the eight students who completed an extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 8.25. Two of the eight students who completed the degree in AC 2019-20 initiated their MA in English program of study before ENGL 5800 revisions, which have been implemented consistently since AC 2016-17. The six students who completed an

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extended, research-based writing project and who benefited from ongoing revisions to ENGL 5800 scored significantly higher, an arithmetic mean of 9.0, although this cohort's score also does not meet the target. The failure to meet the established goal demonstrated, in part, the effective revision to the rubric for AC 2019-20. For AC 2019-20 assessment, the rubric was rewritten to feature more specific evaluative language and thereby increase the rigor and uniformity of evaluation; additionally, the former 5-point scale was rendered as a 10-point scale to capture greater nuance in the assessment of SLOs.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2019-20 results, in 2020-2021, the Graduate Program in English will seek to drive continuous improvement through revision to ENGL 5800, particularly its grading and evaluation of major assignments. ENGL 5800 has long utilized holistic grading, a process that balances a number of factors in tabulation of the score: effectiveness of citation, quality and clarity of composition, practice and implementation of specific skills, and so forth. Written feedback on assignments has offered specific explanation of strengths and areas in need of improvement. To more effectively communicate to students the persistent importance of form and clear writing, the program will create grading rubrics for each of the course's major assignments, ensuring that quality of composition and effectiveness of form appears as a component on all of these rubrics. These rubrics will not only clarify the goals of each assignment, but the consistent inclusion of form and composition as key components of evaluation will provide students with clear indication of that importance of writing skills in graduate English study. The rubric will not wholly replace written feedback which can be used to further emphasize the significance of compositional knowledge as well as articulate specific issues that students must address in their writing.

On the rubric, the AC 2020-21 target for this measure will be set at 8.75. This target will promote continuous improvement and will adjust the goal for the increased specificity and nuance of the substantially revised rubric first implemented in AC 2019-20.

Comprehensive Summary of Key Evidence of Improvements Based on Analysis of Results.

- Revisions to ENGL 5800 implemented.
- Frameworks to support students at the proposal stage of completion projects were created.
- Rubric language and scale revised. These changes were approved by English graduate faculty and implemented for AC 2019-20.
- Students' failure to meet targets for Measures 1, 2, 3, and 4 in AC 2019-20 demonstrates need for curricular changes and professional development for faculty to better serve the program's high standards and commitment to continuous improvement.
- Scores for all measures were lowered by two of the eight-student cohort; this pair initiated their graduate study before ENGL 5800 revisions, which have been

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ongoing since AC 2016-17. The discrepancy between their scores and those of more recent students indicates that actions taken in response to past assessment have improved the program.

- The failure to meet the established goals in all four measures strongly indicates the successful revision of the rubric for AC 2019-20, a new rubric whose more specific language increased the rigor and uniformity of evaluation; additionally and whose significantly expanded 10-points to captured greater nuance in the assessment of SLOs.

Plan of Action Moving Forward.

Lower scores for all four SLOs, whose measure targets were not met for AC 2019-20, have led faculty to the following professional development and curricular refinements:

- In the program's required course ENGL 5800,
 - Revision to two existing assignments will provide students with practice and reflection regarding creative thinking and original analysis.
 - A new lesson will introduce students to specific language on the rubric for extended research-based writing projects to provide a concrete and explicit set of standards regarding critical assumptions, methods, and processes; and
 - Rubrics will be written and implemented for all major assignments with evaluation of composition included in each; the persistent appearance and application of these criteria provide students with explicit communication regarding the importance of writing in graduate work.
- A new curricular component for students in the proposal-stage of their completion projects will provide guidelines that reiterate lessons from ENGL 5800 regarding the review of existing research and synthesis of secondary research with emphasis on articulating how the project contributes to an ongoing research-based conversation.
- Professional development sessions for graduate faculty will
 - Offer strategies for teaching innovative and creative research, particularly through the design of assignments and content of feedback on assignments.
 - Demonstrate means of including in individual assignments components that require students to engage with appropriate critical assumptions, methodologies, and practices; and
 - Convey the difficulty of effective literature review in standard seminar papers and, in turn, share means of teaching core concepts and skills related to literature review through other individual assignments.