

Assessment Cycle 2021-2022

Program: Associate (AGS - 733) and Bachelor (BGS - 734) of General Studies

College: Arts and Sciences

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Northwestern Mission. Northwestern State University is a responsive, student-oriented institution committed to acquiring, creating, and disseminating knowledge through innovative teaching, research, and service. With its certificate, undergraduate, and graduate programs, Northwestern State University prepares its increasingly diverse student population to contribute to an inclusive global community with a steadfast dedication to improving our region, state, and nation.

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.

General Studies Program Mission Statement: Recognizing the value of special programs for students with unusual backgrounds and abilities, the General Studies program is responsive to today's student. It provides flexibility to allow the student's curriculum to adapt to interests, backgrounds, time limitations and career goals. It is especially appropriate for a mature person who has, because of various educational and work experiences, a clear focus and strong commitment to a particular course of study.

Methodology: The assessment process for the BGS program is as follows:

- (1) Data from assessment tools (both direct/indirect and quantitative/qualitative) are collected and returned to the program coordinator.
- (2) The program coordinator will analyze the data to determine whether students have met measurable outcomes. Results from the

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assessment will be discussed with the professional staff advisors.

- (3) The program coordinator, in consultation with the professional staff advisors, may propose changes to measurable outcomes, assessment tools for the next assessment period and where needed, curricula and program changes.
- (4) Based on the low-count of students and/or courses attempted at NSU, students who are pursuing an Associate of General Studies (AGS) degree are factored into, as appropriate, onto the assessment of student learning-outcomes.

Note: The low density of students enrolled in the Associate of General Studies (AGS) program prohibits its assessment independently. The most common scenarios for students awarding of the AGS degree are as follows:

- (1) Student enrolled in a four-year program of study and opted to earn/declare this degree in route to their BS/BA degree. The AGS is a secondary major.
- (2) Students struggling in their four-year program seek out general studies advisor to determine their AGS eligibility.
- (3) The Registrar's Office contacts a former student with sixty or more earned credits and informs them, they may be eligible to receive an AGS. This initiative was a state initiative known as Project Win-Win. NSU has had the most AGS recipients of any ULS school. This program falls in tandem with the Board of Regents' Master Plan to have 60% of all Louisiana adults (ages 25-64) hold a degree or high-valued credential by 2030.

Student Learning Outcomes: Bachelor of General Studies

SLO 1. Students will demonstrate appropriate writing skills.

Course Map: Tied to the course syllabus objectives

IDS 4020: Perspectives / Senior Seminar (all sections, senior year)

IDS 4030: Career Readiness / Senior Seminar (all sections, senior year)

Measure 1.1 (Direct – Skill) IDS 4020: Each fall and spring semester, students will be required to demonstrate written communication skills by creating an organized chronological resume to be assessed by an established grading rubric. The target is to have 90% of BGS students develop a resume that earns a score of 75% or above based upon rubric guidelines.

Findings: Target was not met.

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Analysis: In AC 2020-2021 the target was not met (109/131 students = 83%). To enhance the quality of the assignment, in AC 2021-2022 the course steward made modifications to the resume writing quiz to better align students with the expectations of their professional resume submission. Additionally, the course steward created additional resources breaking down different components of a resume as well as discussing tips and common writing mistakes. Lastly, all IDS 4020 instructors clearly explained that they are willing to meet students virtually for resume review or assistance. As a result, in AC 2021-2022, data shows 86% (80/92) of students earned 75% or above, and the target was not met.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2021-2022 results, in AC 2022-2023 the course steward will record a lecture on resume writing to drive continuous improvement. In AC 2020-2021, we saw an improvement towards our target with the addition of written documents that provided tips on creating a resume and reviewed common writing/formatting mistakes. To ensure we are taking steps to adhere to the wide variety of learning styles of our online learners, the course steward will record a lecture that the students can listen to as opposed to solely having written resources. This addition will support our students whose learning styles identify as more auditory than visual. Additionally, instructors will offer a 1–2-hour window during their office hours on the week the draft resume is due for review or assistance. Moving forward, the students will be highly encouraged to be flexible and willing to schedule any one-on-one appointments with nontraditional, working students who may not be able to meet during standard business hours.

Measure 1.2 (Direct – Skill) IDS 4020: Each fall and spring semester, students are required to demonstrate written communication skills by writing a professional cover letter. The target is to have 90% of BGS students write a cover letter that earns a score of 75% or above (18/25 pts.) based upon established rubric guidelines.

Findings: Target was met.

Analysis: In AC 2020-2021 the target was not met (113/131 students = 86%). To enhance the quality of the assignment, in AC 2021-2022 the course steward made several modifications. Like the approach for the professional resume (Measure 1.1), the course steward created an additional resource breaking down the components of a professional cover letter as well as discussing tips and common writing mistakes. Additionally, all IDS 4020 instructors clearly explained they are willing to meet students virtually for review or assistance in creating their draft and/or final submission. As a result, in AC 2021-2022, data shows 91% (84/92) of students earned 75% or above; therefore, the target was met.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2021-2022 results, in AC 2022-2023 the course steward will record a lecture on cover letter writing to drive continuous improvement. In AC 2020-2021, we saw an improvement and successfully reached our target with the addition of written documents that provided tips on creating a cover letter and reviewed common writing/formatting mistakes. To ensure we are taking

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steps to adhere to the wide variety of learning styles of our online learners, the course steward will record a lecture that the students can listen to rather than only having written resources. This addition will support our students whose learning styles identify as more auditory than visual. Additionally, instructors will offer a 1–2-hour window during their office hours on the week the draft cover letter is due for review or assistance and moving forward are highly encouraged to be flexible and willing to schedule any one-on-one appointments with nontraditional, working students who may not be able to meet during standard business hours.

Measure 1.3 (Direct – Skill) IDS 4030: Each fall and spring semester, students are required to demonstrate written communication skills by creating a minimum 3-page essay in APA format. The topic of the essay is to cover the soft skills needed for their chosen profession and discuss strategies to strengthen them. The required formatting of the essay combined with the necessary research of their chosen profession allows students the opportunity to strengthen their writing skills, especially for those planning on applying to graduate programs. The target is to have 90% of students develop a paper that earns a score of 80% or above based upon rubric guidelines.

Findings: Target was not met.

Analysis: In AC 2020-2021, the target was not met (57/65 students = 87%). To enhance the quality of the assignment, in AC 2021-2022 the course steward provided several resources on APA style writing and implemented an APA style quiz leading up to the submission of the soft skills essay. Additionally, all IDS 4030 instructors were encouraged to provide a sample essay as a reference to provide students with a better sense of expectations regarding the assignment. As a result, in AC 2021-2022 data shows 80% (67/83) of students earned 80% or above; therefore, the target was not met.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2021-2022 results, in AC 2022-2023, the course steward will create a more comprehensive grading rubric to drive continuous improvement. While the instructions and grading expectations for proper APA Style formatting were detailed in AC 2021-2022, a new rubric will be generated to better outline the expectations in terms of the essay's purpose, content, organization, and writing mechanics. The use of this grading rubric will also ensure grading across all sections of the capstone remain consistent. Additionally, instructors will allow the option of submitting a draft for instructor review and feedback for students who would like the opportunity to make adjustments before submitting their essay for final grading.

SLO 2. Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills.

Course Map: Tied to course syllabus objectives

IDS 4020: Perspectives / Senior Seminar (all sections, senior year)

IDS 4030: Career Readiness / Senior Seminar (all sections, senior year)

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Measure 2.1. (Direct – Skill) IDS 4020: Each fall and spring semester, students are required to demonstrate critical thinking skills by participating in several discussion forum prompts throughout the capstone course. These discussions serve as precursors to larger assignments and are designed to encourage independent, critical thinking as students must submit their initial post before they can view their classmates' post and engage in any follow-up discussion. At 15-points each, for a total of 45 points in IDS 4020, the target is to have 90% of students earn a score of 80% (36/45 points) or above based upon rubric guidelines.

Findings: Target was not met.

Analysis: In AC 2020-2021, the target was not met (90/131 students = 68%). To enhance the quality of the assignment, in AC 2021-2022, the course steward increased the point value of each discussion forum. Previously, all discussions forums were only 10-points each only factoring approximately 12% of a student's final grade. Therefore, many students do not participate in every single discussion forum as they knew they could afford to miss those points and still achieve their desired grade. As a result, in AC 2021-2022, data showed that 66% (61/92) of students earned 80% or above; therefore, the target was not met.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2021-2022 results, in AC 2022-2023, the course steward will make modifications to the point value of the assignment to drive continuous improvement. In AC 2020-2021, the point value of each discussion board was raised from 10- to 15-points each. The students' initial response to the discussion prompt was worth 10 of the available 15 points while the remaining 5 were awarded for responding to a minimum of two classmates' post. Data across all sections of the capstone course showed that most students who did not meet the target simply chose not to respond to two or more classmates. Therefore, in AC 2022-2023, the point value of the discussion boards will be increased to 20-points each with equal value to the student's initial post and the required number of classmate responses. The goal is for students to be encouraged to complete the assignment fully, rather than just the portion with the higher point value.

Measure 2.2. (Direct – Skill) IDS 4030: Each fall and spring semester, students are required to demonstrate critical thinking skills by participating in several discussion forum prompts throughout the capstone. These discussions serve as precursors to larger assignments and are designed to encourage independent, critical thinking as students must submit their initial post before they can view their classmates' post and engage in any follow-up discussion. At 15-points each, for a total of 15 points in IDS 4030, the target is to have 90% of students earn a score 80% (12/15 points) or above based upon rubric guidelines.

Findings: Target was not met.

Analysis: In AC 2020-2021, the target was not met (90/131 students = 68%). To enhance the quality of the assignment, in AC 2021-2022, the course steward

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increased the point value of each discussion forum. Previously, all discussions forums were only 10-points each only factoring approximately 12% of a student's final grade. Therefore, many students do not participate in every single discussion forum as they knew they could afford to miss those points and still achieve their desired grade. As a result, in AC 2021-2022, data showed 77% (64/83) of students earned an 80% or above; therefore, the target was not met.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2021-2022 results, in AC 2022-2023, the course steward will make modifications to the point value of the assignment to drive continuous improvement. In AC 2020-2021, the point value of each discussion board was raised from 10- to 15-points each. The students' initial response to the discussion prompt was worth 10 of the available 15 points while the remaining 5 was awarded for responding to a minimum of two classmates' post. Data across all sections of the capstone course showed that most students who did not meet the target simply chose not to respond to two or more classmates. Therefore, in AC 2022-2023, the point value of the discussion boards will be increased to 20-points each with equal value to the student's initial post and the required number of classmate responses. The goal is for students to be encouraged to complete the assignment fully rather than just the portion with the higher point value.

Measure 2.3 (Direct) IDS 4030: Each fall and spring semester, students are required to demonstrate critical thinking skills by completing a final reflection essay, in which students are to reflect on and discuss their capstone and overall undergraduate experience. Students are not only evaluated on the language and appearance of their essay, but they are primarily evaluated on their ability to critically think and personally reflect on this experience. The target is to have 100% of students earn a score of 80% or above (12/15 points) based upon rubric guidelines.

Findings: Target was not met.

Analysis: In AC 2020-2021, the target was not met (62/65 students = 95%). To enhance the quality of the assignment, in AC 2021-2022, the course steward made a few modifications. The final reflection became a mandatory assignment in both IDS 4020 and 4030. In addition, the reflection prompt was adjusted from paragraph format and each question was separated and numbered to help students ensure they were responding to and reflecting on all aspects of the discussion prompt. As a result, in AC 2021-2022, data shows 96% (80/83) of students earned a score of 80% or above; therefore, the target was not met.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2021-2022 results, in AC 2022-2023, the course steward will make modifications to the point value of the assignment to drive continuous improvement towards reaching the target. The final reflection is posted during the final week of the capstone course and is currently only valued at 15 points. Some students choose not to participate in this assignment as they see they can pass the course without these points. Data shows that all of the students

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who submitted the final reflection made the necessary score to reach the target. Therefore, going forward the final reflection's point value will be doubled to encourage student participation as failure to do so has the potential of negatively impacting a student's overall final grade in the course.

SLO 3. Students will identify potential career opportunities.

Course Map: Tied to course syllabus objective

IDS 4020: Perspectives / Senior Seminar (all sections, senior year)

IDS 4030: Career Readiness / Senior Seminar (all sections, senior year)

Measure 3.1. (Direct) IDS 4030: Each fall and spring semester, students enrolled in IDS 4030 will identify relevant career networking agencies, per a class assignment assessed by an established grading rubric. The target is to have 85% of the students earn an assignment score of 80% or above based upon rubric guidelines.

Findings: Target was met.

Analysis: In AC 2020-2021, the target was met (61/65 students = 93%). To enhance the quality of the assignment, in AC 2021-2022 the course steward made modifications to the instructions to ensure the required closing paragraph was not overlooked as it was in previous academic cycles. Additionally, all IDS 4030 instructors gave students the options to identify 5 graduate schools of interest as opposed to career/networking agencies as we noticed an increase in students planning on completing a graduate degree prior to entering into their chosen career. As a result, in AC 2021-2022, data showed that 85% (71/83) of students earned 85% or above; therefore, the target was met.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2021-2022 results, in AC 2022-2023, the course steward will make modifications to the assignment research options to drive continuous improvement. Traditionally, the career networking assignment focused on students identifying potential career/networking agencies within their chosen profession. In AC 2020-2021, we offered an alternative assignment for those students who prefer to research graduate programs in lieu of career opportunities. We will now allow students to pursue a combination of these if they meet the minimum of 5 entries in total. We have seen greater success in reaching our targets when allowing students the opportunity to tailor their research to their interest. Therefore, we will take it a step further and allow students to include both graduate schools and career opportunities as they may be undecided on their plans post-graduation.

Measure 3.2. (Direct) IDS 4030: Each fall and spring semester, 100% of students enrolled in IDS 4030 will complete an informational interview assignment relevant to his/her career interests. The target is to have 85% of the students score 80% or above based upon the rubric.

Findings: Target was met.

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Analysis: In AC 2020-2021, the target was met (59/65 students = 90%). To enhance the quality of the assignment, in AC 2021-2022, the course steward provided a sample informational interview, as well as a list of sample questions. Modifications to the rubric were also made to shift the focus to content and the demonstration of increased understanding. As a result, in AC 2021-2022, data showed 87% (73/83) of students earned a score of 85% or above; therefore, the target was met.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2021-2022 results, in AC 2022-2023, the course steward will make modifications to the content of the assignment to drive continuous improvement. As mentioned in the prior measure, we have seen greater success in reaching our targets when allowing students, the opportunity to tailor their assignments/research to their own goals and interest. While all students will still participate in an informational interview, they will now be given the option to reach out to a representative/advisor from a graduate school of interest to gain more insight into the program as opposed to a professional in their field of interest. For those students who are more focused on professional studies post-graduation, this will allow them the opportunity to gather the information needed in determining if a particular program is right for them.

Measure 3.3 (Direct – Skill) IDS 4020: Each fall and spring semester, students are required to participate in a mock interview assignment. Students will be paired with a classmate who shares similar career interest, and they will each host a mock interview for the other via Microsoft Teams. This will allow each student to not only gain experience in a formal interview setting but will also allow them to witness an interview from the other side, which will hopefully provide them the opportunity to identify additional “dos and don’ts” of the interview process. The target is to have 90% of students earn a score of 80% or above based upon rubric guidelines.

Findings: Target was met.

Analysis: In AC 2020-2021, the target was not met (113/131 students = 86%). To enhance the quality of the assignment, in AC 2021-2022, the course steward made several adjustments. Due to conflicting schedules, students were given a larger window to meet and complete this assignment. Students were also paired with a partner who shared similar career goals or experiences to also served as a potential networking opportunity for the future. Additionally, all instructors informed students they were willing to meet virtually to practice and/or conduct the mock interview themselves to allow more one-on-one feedback between student and instructor. As a result, in AC 2021-2022, data showed 91% (84/92) of students earned a score of 80% or above; therefore, the target was met.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the 2021-2022 results, in AC 2022-2023, the course steward will provide additional resources to drive continuous improvement. Although the target was met, most students who did not reach the target submitted inadequate interviews. To help provide clearer expectations on what we are looking

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for, the course steward will record a video lecture addressing common interview questions and tips on how to best respond. The video will also review the rubric to ensure all students understand and are aware of the expectations for successfully completing the assignment. Additionally, this video lecture will support our students whose learning styles identify as more auditory than visual.

Comprehensive summary of key evidence of improvements based on analysis of results: The following reflects all the changes implemented to drive the continuous process of seeking improvement in AC 2021-2022. These changes are based on the knowledge gained through the analysis of AC 2020-2021 results.

- The resume writing quiz was modified to better align students with the expectations of their professional resume submission.
- All instructors made themselves available to meet virtually to review both resume and cover letter submissions.
- Students were given additional resources on APA style writing and participated in an APA style quiz leading up to the submission of their soft skills paper.
- Students were given a sample soft skills paper as a reference to have a better sense of content expectations.
- The point value of all discussion forums was increased so that they weigh heavier on student's final grade thereby encouraging participation.
- The final reflection became a mandatory assignment in both IDS 4020 and 4030.
- The reflection prompt was adjusted from paragraph format and each question was separated and numbered to help students ensure they are responding to and reflecting on all aspects of the discussion prompt.
- Modifications to the career network assignment instructions were made clearer so students do not miss any portion of the assignment.
- Students were also given the opportunity to identify 5 graduate programs of interest as opposed to career agencies.
- All instructors made themselves available to meet virtually to practice and/or conduct the mock interview assignment.
- Modifications to the rubric were made to make content and the demonstration of increased understanding the primary focus when grading.
- Instructors matched mock interview partners based on having similar professional goals or experiences, to possibly provide students a networking opportunity for the future.

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Plan of action moving forward:

- Recorded lectures will be added to several assignments (resume, cover letter, and mock interview) to not only review the instructions and expectations for the assignment, but also to better support the variety of learning styles of our students.
- Instructors will offer 1–2-hour windows during their office hours to aid and/or provide feedback for the resume and cover letter assignments and are also highly encouraged to accommodate any nontraditional students outside of this window as needed.
- The course steward will create a more comprehensive grading rubric for the soft skills essay to better outline the expectations of the assignment, as well as ensure consistent grading across all sections of the capstone.
- Students will be given the option to submit a draft of their soft skills essay for review and feedback before submitting their final draft for grading.
- The point value of all discussion boards will be increased with equal value to the student's initial post and the required number of classmate responses to encourage full participation.
- The point value of the final reflection will be doubled to ensure all students participate and produce quality level work.
- Students will now have the option to research a combination of both career opportunities and graduate schools to complete their career networking assignment.
- Students will now have the option to contact an advisor/representative from a graduate school of interest to complete their informational interview.