

AC 2022-2023 Assessment

Program: Master's of Art in English (529)

College: Arts and Sciences

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Northwestern State University 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.

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 Outcomes.

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 8.35 or higher on the revised rubric for “Ideas”: student “employ[s] creative thinking, innovation, and critical inquiry.”

Findings: Target was not met.

Analysis: In AC 2021-2022, the target of 8.45 was not met, as the four students who completed an extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 7.75. In the extended, research-based writing students represented effective endeavor to think originally and critically, taking a reasonable approach to content and made some contribution to the disciplinary conversations. However, they did not demonstrate proficiency in creative and critical thinking by expressly taking innovative approaches to content and making apt contributions to disciplinary conversations through their argumentation. Although revisions to ENGL 5800 in AC 2021-2022 supported students in developing original research-based ideas, these additions were not reflected in other coursework and assignments outside ENGL 5800. As a result, a plan of action was set by the faculty to support students in improving the implementation of innovative critical inquiry.

As a result of the analysis of AC 2021-2022, in AC 2022-2023, the target was not met. The faculty conducted a professional development workshop in which faculty members with assignments targeting and benefiting innovative and creative research design shared their pedagogy and other faculty articulated specific changes they would make to their own curriculum following the lessons of the workshop, thereby providing students with new instruction and assignments that contribute to their success regarding SLO1. The fourteen students who completed an extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 8.07. Although the failure to meet this target is addressed fully below, two notes are warranted. First, the mean of 8.07 represents a significant improvement of 0.32 points following the AC 2021-2022 average score. Second, one student’s score in AC 2022-2023 was exceptionally low such that when this single score is removed from the data set, the target was met with the thirteen remaining students scoring an arithmetic mean of 8.46. The latter note was considered in establishing a future target score for SLO1.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2022-2023 results, in AC 2023-2024 the Graduate Program in English will drive continuous improvement through alterations to the scheduling of completion project administration in ENGL 5980 (Thesis) and ENGL 6950 (Research Problems). Students pursuing the thesis option previously were required to have fully approved formal thesis proposal before they could enroll in ENGL 5980. Similarly, students pursuing the PIL were required to secure full approval of their proposed papers before enrolling in ENGL 6950. The revised requirement specifies that thesis students must form their committee prior to enrollment in ENGL 5980 and will complete their proposal, for distribution to and approval from the committee, by the fifth week of the first semester of ENGL 5980. Professors directing PIL students in ENGL 6950 similarly will dedicate up to the first five weeks of the semester to paper proposal and development. The extended proposal period allows faculty to better direct the plans of these projects, their intended critical contributions, and their application of theoretical input to original ends.

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Similarly, students gain more time to build core knowledge of extant literature, whose methods both model innovative approaches and demonstrate established interpretations and understanding that will benefit from new questions and constructive reconsideration. As such, these revisions to the scheduling structures serve the design of completion projects that more fully implement creative thinking, innovation, and critical inquiry.

Furthermore, in ENGL 5800, the “Final Proposal” assignment will be revised. The scheduling of this sequenced or scaffolded assignment will be expanded to include additional feedback from the professor with comments focused on the implementation of creative thinking, innovation, and critical inquiry. To support this, a template of *why* and *how* based questions regarding original research and inventive interpretation will be utilized. This addition to the “Final Proposal” assignment parallels the changes made to the administration of completion projects noted above.

On the rubric, the AC 2023-2024 target for this measure will be set at 8.4 to promote continuous improvement.

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.

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All students will achieve an average of 8.0 or higher on the revised rubric for “Context”: student “demonstrate[s] a command of pertinent critical assumptions, methodologies, and practices.”

Findings: Target was met.

Analysis: In AC 2021-2022, the target 8.25 was not met, as the four students who completed an extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 7.25. Students situated their extended, research-based writing projects within a defined but not a well-defined theoretical framework, and they provided a reasonable but not compelling rationale for that approach, proceeding through related but not clearly related methodologies. Changes made to ENGL 5800 in AC 2021-2022 engaged students in reflection on methods and critical assumptions; however, these skills could benefit for more practice in other courses. As a result, a plan of action was set by the faculty to support students in articulating and implementing the methodological contexts of their academic research.

As a result of the analysis of AC 2021-2022, in AC 2022-2023, the target was met. The faculty conducted a professional development workshop in which faculty members with assignments teaching and exercising context and effective critical methods within English studies presented their pedagogy and other faculty articulated specific changes they would make to their own curriculum following the lessons of the workshop. As such, all English graduate courses added or refined assignments or components of assignments that engage students in practice that contributes to their understanding of SLO2. Additionally in AC 2022-2023, also in following the plan of action from the previous year, in ENGL 5800, an assignment focused on the application of critical practices and methodologies was substantially expanded to address, in writing, implementation, justification, and reflection on methodologies and critical assumptions. The fourteen students who completed an extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 8.21.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2022-2023 results, in AC 2023-2024 the Graduate Program in English will drive continuous improvement through revision to ENGL 5800. The course will implement new readings and accompanying discussion assignment, all focused on epistemology and knowledge production in English Studies, introducing these as a framing concept for ENGL 5800.

On the rubric, the AC 2023-2024 target for this measure will be set at 8.30 to promote continuous improvement.

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

Measure 3.1 (direct—student artifact)

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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 8.35 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 was not met.

Analysis: In AC 2021-2022, the target 8.25 was not met, as the four students who completed an extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 7.25. Students located their extended, research-based writing projects within defined but not clearly defined academic contexts. Their literature reviews presented and synthesized relevant research; however, the reviews could benefit from increased thoroughness and explicit specific articulation of how their project contributed to ongoing academic conversations. A professional development session was conducted in AC 2021-2022 to improve all faculty members' understanding and instruction of SLO3; however, this did not result in adequate concrete changes to course instruction. As a result, a plan of action was set by the faculty to support students in thorough literature reviews that aptly situate their research projects and arguments.

As a result of analysis of AC 2021-2022 data, in AC 2022-2023 the target was not met. The faculty conducted professional development workshop in which professors with assignments that teach, and exercise literature review and synthesis of extant research shared their approaches. Other faculty articulated specific changes they would make to their curriculum to build on and apply the lessons shared in the workshop thereby significantly expanding the exercises and assignment components that engage students in practice of SLO3. Additionally, in AC 2022-2023 following the plan of action from AC

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2021-2022, changes were made to assignments related to literature review in ENGL 5800 to provide all students with additional instruction and practice in SLO3. The fourteen students who completed an extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 8.07. The failure of meeting this target is addressed fully below; nevertheless, two notes are warranted. First, the average of 8.07 represents a significant improvement of 0.8 points following the AC 2021-2022 average score. Second, one AC 2022-2023 student's score was exceptionally low such that when this outlying score is removed from the data set, the target was met with the thirteen remaining students scoring an arithmetic mean of 8.46. The latter note received consideration in establishing a future target score for SLO3.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2022-2023 results, in AC 2023-2024, the Graduate Program in English will drive continuous improvement through alterations to the scheduling of completion project administration in ENGL 5980 (Thesis) and ENGL 6950 (Research Problems). Students pursuing the thesis option previously were required to secure full approval of their formal proposal by all committee members before they could enroll in ENGL 5980. Similarly, students pursuing the PIL required full approval of their proposed papers before enrolling in ENGL 6950. The revised requirement specifies that thesis students must form their committee prior to enrollment in ENGL 5980 and will complete their proposal, for distribution to and approval from the committee, by the fifth week of the first semester of ENGL 5980. Professors directing PIL students in ENGL 6950 similarly will dedicate up to the first five weeks of the semester to paper proposal and development. The extended proposal period allows faculty to fully direct and inform the survey of extant published research and, therefore, to support student's preparation of comprehensive literature reviews. Similarly, students gain more time to synthesize critical work already in print, enabling better situation of their completion projects within ongoing critical conversations appropriate to their specific investigation and their work within a specialized discipline of English studies. As such, these revisions to the scheduling serve the design of completion projects that more fully analyze, synthesize, and contextualize relevant research in relation to new interpretations and contexts that form the focus of the completion projects.

In ENGL 5800, new readings will be assigned: a set of literature reviews that model excellent synthesis and application of extant research. Students will activate the knowledge gained from reading these models in the "Final Proposal" assignment. This assignment requires that students generate a literature review for a mock-thesis proposal. As part of this sequenced or scaffolded assignment, new templates for peer-review and development-based discussion of drafts of the "Final Proposal" assignment will direct class members to assess the synthesis of extant research in their peers' work and reflect upon their own success in this regard.

On the rubric, the AC 2023-24 target for this measure will be set at 8.4 to promote continuous improvement.

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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 8.5 or higher on the revised rubric for "Form": student "practice[s] sophisticated writing skills appropriate to stylistic conventions and genre expectations."

Findings: Target was met.

Analysis: In AC 2020-2021, the target of 8.65 was not met, as the four students who completed an extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 7.75. In their extended, research-based writing projects, students followed academic conventions and communicated essential information clearly; however, they did not do so with clarity, precision, and coherence. ENGL 5800 was revised to add reflective writing assignments in which students articulated lessons of advanced composition gained from reading scholarship. However, the transferability of these lessons was not adequately foregrounded by instruction in other graduate courses. As a result, a plan of action was set by the faculty to support students in practicing sophisticated writing skills appropriate to stylistic conventions and genre expectations.

As a result of the analysis of AC 2021-2022, in AC 2022-2023, the target was met. A targeted professional development workshop was conducted with Graduate English

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faculty in which faculty with assignments and instruction innovative and specific to SLO4 shared their approaches. In response, other faculty articulated concrete changes they would make to assignments in their individual courses following these presentations, thereby adding new instruction and practice of SLO4 in all graduate English courses. The fourteen students who completed an extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 8.57.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2022-2023 results, in AC 2023-2024, the Graduate Program in English will drive continuous improvement through ongoing professional development and revision to ENGL 5800. First, professional development sessions will be conducted. In addition to providing training for and discussion of all four SLOs, there will be a generated list of skills for teaching graduate-level composition for future consideration. In AC 2023-2024, graduate faculty will conduct a professional development workshop that targets these points articulated as productive for future improvement. Furthermore, ENGL 5800 will add a brief module focused on Joseph Williams' guidelines for revision. These concepts serve clear communication of complex ideas, teaching students to revise to remove nominalizations and prioritize the grammatical points of emphasis in standard sentence structure.

On the rubric, the AC 2023-24 target for this measure will be set at 8.7 to promote continuous improvement.

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

- Faculty were surveyed regarding their implementation of the four SLOs.
- The faculty conducted a professional development workshop in which faculty members with assignments targeting and benefiting innovative and creative research design shared their pedagogy and other faculty articulated specific changes they would make to their own curriculum following the lessons of the workshop, thereby providing students with new instruction and assignments that contribute to their success regarding SLO1.
- The faculty conducted a professional development workshop in which faculty members with assignments teaching and exercising context and effective critical methods within English studies presented their pedagogy and other faculty articulated specific changes they would make to their own curriculum following the lessons of the workshop. As such, all English graduate courses added or refined assignments or components of assignments that engage students in practice that contributes to their understanding of SLO2.
- In ENGL 5800, an assignment focused on the application of critical practices and methodologies was substantially expanded to address, in writing, implementation, justification, and reflection on methodologies and critical assumptions.

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- The faculty conducted professional development workshop in which professors with assignments that teach, and exercise literature review and synthesis of extant research shared their approaches. Other faculty articulated specific changes they would make to their curriculum to build on and apply the lessons shared in the workshop thereby significantly expanding the exercises and assignment components that engage students in practice of SLO3.
- Changes were made to assignments related to literature review in ENGL 5800 to provide all students with additional instruction and practice in SLO3.
- A targeted professional development workshop was conducted with Graduate English faculty in which faculty with assignments and instruction innovative and specific to SLO4 shared their approaches. In response, other faculty articulated concrete changes they would make to assignments in their individual courses following these presentations, thereby adding new instruction and practice of SLO4 in all graduate English courses.

Plan of Action Moving Forward.

- Targets for all four SLOs in AC 2023-2024 have been set with consideration of the AC 2022-2023 averages but also with acknowledgment that one score of the fourteen-person cohort was a low outlier for each SLO.
- In the program's required course ENGL 5800,
 - The design of the "Final Proposal" assignment will be revised to include additional feedback following a response template regarding the implementation of creative thinking, innovation, and critical inquiry.
 - New readings and accompanying discussion assignment will foreground epistemology and knowledge production in English Studies as framing concepts of the course.
 - A set of literature reviews that model excellent synthesis and application of extant research will be assigned and conventions modeled by these readings implemented in the "Final Proposal" assignment; and
 - A brief new module will be added to introduce Joseph Williams' guidelines for revision.
- Professional development workshop will be conducted based on concepts regarding graduate-level composition generated through AC 2022-2023 pedagogy sessions.
- The scheduling of completion project administration in ENGL 5980 (Thesis) and ENGL 6950 (Research Problems) will be altered such that:

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- Thesis proposals will be due to committees by the end of the first five weeks of the first semester of ENGL 5980 and paper proposals will be approved by the end of the first five weeks of ENGL 6950; and
- The initial five weeks of ENGL 5980 and ENGL 6950 revisit and implement practices for comprehensive literature review and innovative contribution to research-based knowledge in the development and execution of completion projects.