

Assessment Cycle 2024-2025

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

College of 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.

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. Recognizing the value of special programs for students with unusual backgrounds and abilities, the General Studies program is responsive to today's students. 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, quantitative, and 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 assessment will be discussed with the professional staff advisors.

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- (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 number of students and/or courses attempted at NSU, students who are pursuing an Associate of General Studies (AGS) degree are factored into, as appropriate, the assessment of student learning outcomes.

Student Learning Outcomes: Bachelor of General Studies

SLO 1. Students will demonstrate appropriate writing skills.

Measure 1.1 (Direct – knowledge)

Description: Students will be required to demonstrate written communication skills by creating an organized, chronological resume.

Course Map: Tied to the course syllabus objectives.
IDS 4020: Perspectives / Senior Seminar

Acceptable Target: Ninety percent (90%) of students earn 75% or higher on the assignment assessed using an established rubric.

Ideal Target: All (100%) students will pass the assessments with a score of at least eighty percent (80%).

Implementation Plan (timeline): Each semester.

Key/Responsible Personnel: Instructor of IDS 4020.

Findings: Target was met.

Analysis: In AC 2023-2024, the target was met ($78/86 = 91\%$). Changes were made last year to require students to highlight in yellow at least five action verbs used in the descriptions of their present and/or past job positions (e.g., facilitated, monitored, implemented, etc.) to stress the importance of action verb usage for their final resume submission and enhance professional tone in resume writing.

Based on the analysis of AC 2023-2024's results, the faculty made the following changes in AC 2024-2025 to drive the cycle of improvement and further student progress. The grading rubric was revised to include several additional terms and conditions. For example, three or more spelling and grammar mistakes found in the final resume will require (1) resubmission and (2) an automatic 15-point deduction on this 40-point assignment. These changes were made to strengthen the academic rigor of the assignment and raise the quality benchmark to help drive home the importance of professional communication.

As a result of these changes in AC 2024-2025, the target was met. The target was achieved with 92% (81/88) of students earning a score of 75% or higher on the assessed assignments using the established rubric.

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Decision: In AC 2024-2025, the target was met. Based on the AC 2024-2025 results analysis, the following changes will be made to drive improvement for AC 2025-2026. Resume resources and the rubric will be updated to reflect new and relevant resume practices (e.g., no full address in resume header; ATS-compatible language; use of the three C's of clear, concise, consistent; LinkedIn connectivity; etc.) A new lecture video will be recorded to align the assignment content with technology-driven hiring practices, giving the students insight into modern career readiness and reinforcing the knowledge with direct instruction.

Measure 1.2 (Direct – Skill) IDS 4020

Description: Students will be required to demonstrate written communication skills by writing a professional cover letter.

Course Map: Tied to the course syllabus objectives.
IDS 4020: Perspectives/ Senior Seminar

Acceptable Target: Ninety percent (90%) of students earn 75% or higher on the assignment assessed using an established rubric.

Ideal Target: All (100%) students will pass the assessment with a score of at least eighty percent (80%).

Implementation Plan (timeline): Each semester.

Key/Responsible Personnel: Instructor of IDS 4020.

Findings: Target was met.

Analysis: In AC 2023-2024, the target was met (79/86 students = 92%). During the previous year, resources were added to provide additional support, and the students were required to submit a first draft in which the students clearly stated the position title for which they were applying.

Based on the analysis of AC 2023-2024 results, the faculty implemented the following changes in AC 2024-2025. The AC 2024-2025 cover letter grading rubric had a new condition - three or more spelling and grammar errors required (1) resubmission and (2) an automatic 10-point deduction on this 25-point assignment. These assignment expectations were adjusted to emphasize attention to detail, professionalism, and technical writing skills.

As a result of these changes in AC 2024-2025, the target was met with 85/88 (96%) students scoring 75% or higher on the assessed assignments using an established rubric.

Decision: In AC 2024-2025, the target was met at 96%. Based on the analysis of AC 2024-2025 results, in AC 2025-2026, the course steward and instructors will drive improvement by implementing the following changes. The AC 2025-2026 cover letter draft assignment will be edited to require students to mark specific sections of their cover letter draft. To promote intentional writing, students will annotate their cover letter drafts on the

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second page of their assignment document. Requiring students to highlight different parts of their paragraphs will help ensure they meet the criteria according to the rubric. An example will be provided for students to help with instructional clarity.

Measure 1.3 (Direct – Skill) IDS 4030

Description: Students will be required to demonstrate written communication skills by creating a 3-page paper covering soft skills needed for their chosen career.

Course Map: Tied to the course syllabus objectives.
IDS 4030: Career Readiness / Senior Seminar

Acceptable Target: Ninety-five percent (95%) of students earn 80% or higher on the assignment assessed using an established rubric.

Ideal Target: All (100%) students will pass the assessments with a score of at least eighty percent (80%).

Implementation Plan (timeline): Each semester.

Key/Responsible Personnel: Instructor of IDS 4030.

Findings: Target was not met.

Analysis: In AC 2023-2024, the target was met (48/49 students = 98%). The course steward and instructors provided several resources on APA-style writing. They implemented an APA-style quiz leading up to the submission of the soft skills essay. Additionally, all IDS 4030 instructors provided students with a sample essay as a reference to illustrate expectations regarding the assignment. Instructors required all students to submit an earlier, mandatory assignment of their first paragraph, which included the three soft skills they would address in their paper.

Based on the analysis of AC 2023-2024 results, the faculty implemented the following changes in AC 2024-2025. Students were provided with feedback to ensure a successful start on their mandatory first paragraph assignment in which they introduce the three soft skills. This edit was reflected in an adjustment to the grading rubric. The acceptable target was increased to 95%.

Despite these changes, in AC 2024-2025, the target was not met (70/90 students = 78%).

Decision: In AC 2024-2025, the target was not met (78%). Based on the analysis of these results, in AC 2025-2026, the course steward and instructors will drive improvement by updating the accompanying APA quiz to require a minimum of 5 full points (100%). This will help students who lose points on formatting issues on their first paragraph and final paper. Additionally, existing soft skills resources will be updated.

SLO 2. Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills.

Measure 2.1. (Direct – Skill) IDS 4020

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Description: Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills by completing several discussion board forums throughout the capstone course.

Course Map: Tied to the course syllabus objectives.
IDS 4020: Perspectives / Senior Seminar

Acceptable Target: Ninety percent (90%) of students will produce three discussion board posts that earn a score of at least eighty percent (80%).

Ideal Target: All (100%) students will pass the assessments with a score of at least eighty percent (80%).

Implementation Plan (timeline): Each semester.

Key/Responsible Personnel: IDS 4020 faculty member.

Findings: Target was not met.

Analysis: In AC 2023-2024, the target was not met (65/86 students = 76%). The course steward and instructors required forum posts to have the following: (1) a minimum word requirement; (2) be well-organized, concise, and easily understood; and (3) a minimum response to at least two other students' posts. The course stewards reinforced this expectation.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2023-2024 results, the faculty implemented the following changes in AC 2024-2025: (1) a minimum word requirement; (2) be well-organized, concise, and easily understood; and (3) there must be a response to at least two other student posts. Additionally, the instructor labeled and highlighted these three previously mentioned requirements in the discussion board thread. The total point value for all discussion board posts increased from 60 to 90 points.

As a result of these changes in AC 2024-2025, the target was not met (72/88 students = 82%).

Decision: In AC 2024-2025, the target was not met (82%). Based on the analysis of these results, the following changes will be made to drive improvement in AC 2025-2026. A clear rubric for each discussion board will be made to show clearly how points will be distributed. For example, for a 30-point discussion board, students will see that (1) 15 points will be awarded for answering the prompt in a well-organized, concise way, (2) 5 points will be awarded per response to classmates, and (3) 5 points will be awarded for turning the posts in on time. Based on a pattern in previous AC years, the acceptable target will be lowered to 85% for AC 2025-2026.

Measure 2.2. (Direct – Skill) IDS 4030

Description: Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills by completing several discussion board forum prompts throughout the capstone course.

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Course Map: Tied to the course syllabus objectives.
IDS 4030: Career Readiness / Senior Seminar

Acceptable Target: Eighty percent (80%) of students will produce three discussion board posts that earn a score of at least eighty percent (80%).

Ideal Target: All (100%) students will pass the assessments with a score of at least eighty percent (80%).

Implementation Plan (timeline): Each semester

Key/Responsible Personnel: IDS 4030 faculty member

Findings: Target was not met

Analysis: In AC 2023-2024, the target was not met as 11/17 students (65%) scored 16/20 total points on their respective soft skills discussion board assignment. To help drive improvement, the following changes were made for AC 2023-2024. The course steward and instructors required forum posts to have the following: (1) a minimum word requirement; (2) be well-organized, concise, and easily understood; and (3) a minimum response to at least two other students' posts steward reinforced.

Based on the analysis of AC 2023-2024's results, the course steward and instructors implemented the following changes in AC 2024-2025. Students were still required to complete all discussion board posts, complying with the following:

- (1) a minimum word requirement;
- (2) be well-organized, concise, and easily understood; and
- (3) a required response to at least two other students' posts.

Additionally, the instructor labeled and highlighted these three previously mentioned requirements in the discussion board thread. Instructors reinforced the assignment description of completing the discussion boards accurately. Finally, the maximum possible points were increased from 60 to 90 points to drive home the importance of these three discussion board assignments. Students still struggled with completing the forum posts within the required parameters and turning the assessed assignment in. Three (3) out of the 6 Soft Skills discussion board answers below 80% were never submitted, resulting in assignment scores of zeroes.

As a result of these changes in AC 2024-2025, the target was not met (15/21 students = 71%).

Decision: In AC 2024-2025, the target was not met. Based on the analysis of these results, in AC 2025-2026, the course steward will drive improvement by creating rubrics for discussion boards to show students distinctly where points will be deducted. Having concise instructions with a clear rubric will help students address issues that result in a deduction of points

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Measure 2.3 (Direct) IDS 4030

Description: 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.

Course Map: Tied to the course syllabus objectives.
IDS 4030: Career Readiness / Senior Seminar

Acceptable Target: One hundred percent (100%) of students will produce a score of 24/30 points, earning at least eighty percent (80%).

Ideal Target: All (100%) students will pass the assessments with a score of at least eighty percent (80%).

Implementation Plan (timeline): Each semester.

Key/Responsible Personnel: IDS 4030 faculty member.

Findings: Target was not met.

Analysis: In AC 2023-2024, the target was met with 98% (84/86 students = 98%) earning 80% or above. Students addressed three significant lessons learned from their capstone experience (extended from one significant lesson). Additionally, students were tasked to describe one area/topic the instructor should expand on. As in previous years, students struggled with how to address the three significant lessons learned from their capstone experience.

Based on the analysis of AC 2023-2024 results, the faculty implemented the following changes in AC 2024-2025. The course steward and instructors used the same assignment delivery format; however, they re-designed the scaffolding assignments to help the students identify which experiences they want to highlight earlier in the semester. The acceptable target was increased to 100% (or greater than 24/30 points or 80%). This assignment remained mandatory for the course as it helps students demonstrate critical thinking skills and reflect on all information provided in the capstone.

As a result of these changes in AC 2024-2025, the target was not met (88/90 students =98%).

Decision: In AC 2024-2025, the target was not met (98%). The identical percentage from AC 2023-2024 (98%) reflects that additional changes may be necessary. Based on the analysis of these results, in AC 2025-2026, the course steward and instructors will drive improvement by providing assignment instructions earlier in the semester. As mentioned previously, students struggle with identifying significant lessons learned from the capstone. Having the instructions listed earlier in the semester will give students additional time to consider the assignment requirements.

SLO 3. Students will identify potential career opportunities.

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Description: Students will identify relevant career networking agencies (or future graduate programs).

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

Description: Students will identify relevant career networking agencies (or future graduate programs).

Course Map: Tied to the course syllabus objectives.

IDS 4030: Career Readiness / Senior Seminar

Acceptable Target: Eighty-five percent (85%) of the students will score 80% or higher on the course assignment.

Ideal Target: All (100%) students will score 80% or higher on the course assignment.

Implementation Plan (timeline): Each semester.

Key/Responsible Personnel: IDS 4030 faculty member.

Findings: Target was not met.

Analysis: In AC 2023-2024, the target was not met (66/86 students = 77%). Students in the previous cohort struggled with providing specificity regarding their Human Resources, Hiring Manager, or Graduate Coordinator point of contact, which was the purpose of the assignment. The course steward made edits to the career network assignment directions. Students were instructed to identify a specific point of contact (first name, last name, and job title).

Based on analysis of the AC 2023-2024 results, the faculty implemented the following changes in AC 2024-2025. The course steward and instructors adjusted the instructions to clearly state requirements for point of contact. In addition, the point value of the assignment increased from 20 to 30 points.

As a result of these changes in AC 2024-2025, the target was not met (75/90 students = 83%). However, the percentage rose by 6% demonstrating a marked improvement.

Decision: In AC 2024-2025, the target was not met (83%). Based on the analysis of these results, in AC 2025-2026, the course steward will upload additional resources on the importance of networking and how to network. Enhancing these skills will help build student confidence in finding employment opportunities and competence in initiating professional connections. Many of our traditionally-aged students (21-22) may be networking outside of the University for the first time. Additionally, a blank template will be made available for use that emphasizes each requirement and encourages full participation from the student.

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Measure 3.2. (Direct) IDS 4030

Description: Students will complete an informational interview assignment relevant to their career interests.

Course Map: Tied to course syllabus objectives.
IDS 4030: Career Readiness / Senior Seminar

Acceptable Target: Eighty-five percent (85%) of the students will score 80% or higher on the course assignment, assessed with an established grading rubric.

Ideal Target: All (100%) students will score 80% or higher on the course assignment.

Implementation Plan (timeline): Each semester.

Key/Responsible Personnel: IDS 4030 faculty member.

Findings: Target was met.

Analysis: In AC 2023-2024, the target was met (80/86 students = 93%), increasing 5 percentage points from the previous academic cycle. Instructors allowed students to individualize the assignment. The instructors reminded the students several weeks prior to the due date of this assignment and gave the students an opportunity to ask any clarifying questions.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2023-2024 results, the faculty implemented the following changes in AC 2024-2025. The informational interview was assigned 3-4 weeks in advance. Additionally, students were required to e-mail the instructor and/or participate in a discussion board with details regarding their informational interviewee and what the career (or graduate program) is. Students struggled with this assignment in two major regards: (1) turning this assignment in on time and, (2) demonstrating an understanding of the field and what lessons were learned in their interview.

As a result of these changes in AC 2024-2025, the target was met (78/90 students = 86%).

Decision: In AC 2024-2025, the target was met (86%). Based on the analysis of these results, in AC 2025-2026, the course steward and instructors will drive improvement by adding an additional component to the instructions that will require specific questions to answer in paragraph format so that students may reflect on their interview and how it impacts their career exploration. Additionally, moving forward, this assignment will be in APA format. These changes will be made to reinforce writing standards and help prepare students for the expectations of graduate study or professional documentation.

Measure 3.3 (Direct – Skill) IDS 4020

Description: Students will complete a mock interview assignment in which each student is paired with a classmate with a similar career interest.

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Course Map: Tied to the course syllabus objectives.
IDS 4030: Career Readiness / Senior Seminar

Acceptable Target: Ninety percent (90%) of the students will score 80% or higher on the course assignment, assessed with an established grading rubric.

Ideal Target: All (100%) students will score 80% or higher on the course assignment.

Implementation Plan (timeline): Each semester.

Key/Responsible Personnel: IDS 4030 faculty member.

Findings: Target was met.

Analysis: In AC 2023-24, the target was met (78/86 students = 91%). Students were partnered with a peer who had similar career or graduate school interests. Each student had a turn being the interviewer and the interviewee. Students, including professionals who had been in their career field for a sizeable period, gave feedback detailing their nervousness for this assignment.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2023-2024 results, the faculty implemented the following change in AC 2024-2025. The IDS instructors paid special attention to student surroundings and graded accordingly (sloppy interview attire, interview on bed, pillow in lap, are not acceptable). The grading rubric reflected 10 additional points to evaluate business casual attire and an appropriate online setting.

As a result of these changes in AC 2024-2025, the target was met (83/88 students = 94%).

Decision: In AC 2024-2025, the target was met (94%). Based on the analysis of the results, in AC 2025-2026, the following changes will be made to drive improvement. Students will be given updated interview materials to help prepare for common interview questions. Common interview approaches (i.e., STAR method) will be outlined and a lecture video will be recorded to enhance learning. Providing clear methods for answering interview questions will help with student nervousness and allow for concise, intelligent answers. Additionally, a time limit of a minimum of 5 minutes per interview will be implemented. Some students finish their interview questions in under 3 minutes and do not allow enough time to fully engage with the interview practice.

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 2024-2025. These changes are based on the knowledge gained through the AC 2023-2024 results analysis.

- In Measure 1.1, the grading rubric was revised to include a couple of additional terms and conditions; for example, three or more spelling and grammar mistakes found on the final resume required (1) resubmission and (2) an automatic 15-point deduction on this 40-point assignment.

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- In Measure 1.2, the cover letter grading rubric was revised to include a new condition - three or more spelling and grammar errors will require (1) resubmission and (2) an automatic 10-point deduction on this 25-point assignment.
- In Measure 1.3, instructors provided the students with feedback, ensuring that their students have a successful start on their mandatory first paragraph assignment in which they introduce the three soft skills. This edit was reflected in an adjustment to the grading rubric. The target increased to 95%.
- In Measure 2.1, students were required to complete all discussion board posts, complying with the following: (1) a minimum word requirement; (2) be well-organized, concise, and easily understood; and (3) there must be a response to at least two other students' posts. Additionally, instructors labeled and highlighted these three previously mentioned requirements in the discussion board thread. The instructor reinforced the assignment description of completing the discussion boards accurately. Total points were increased from 60 to 90 points.
- In Measure 2.2, the course steward and instructors drove improvement by requiring students to complete all discussion board posts, complying with the following: (1) a minimum word requirement; (2) be well-organized, concise, and easily understood; and (3) students must respond to at least two other students' posts. Instructors labeled and highlighted these three previously mentioned requirements in the discussion board thread, reinforcing the assignment description and the importance of completing the discussion boards accurately.
- In Measure 2.3, the same assignment delivery format was used; however, instructors redesigned the scaffolding assignments to help the students identify which experiences they wanted to highlight earlier in the semester. Additionally, the course steward increased the acceptable target to 100%.
- In Measure 3.1, the course steward and instructors redesigned the career network assignment to ensure students were aware of the assignment directions. Instructors required all students to (1) identify a specific point of contact (first name, last name, and job title) to lessen the number of students giving vague or incomplete answers. The same adjustment was made for graduate programs (e.g., the student must list a specific point of contact rather than simply "Graduate Coordinator"). In addition, the point value of the assignment increased from 20 to 30 points to help convey the importance of the assignment.
- In Measure 3.2, the course steward and instructors added specificity to the interview. The project was assigned 3-4 weeks in advance. Each student was instructed to email the instructor at least one week in advance with details about who the interview will be with and what the career (or graduate program) is. Instructions were added during week two of the semester for the student to email the instructor in advance to share the details of the interview the student planned to conduct.
- In Measure 3.3, Instructors paid special attention and graded accordingly to surroundings and details in the interview video (i.e., sloppy interview attire,

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interview on bed, pillow in lap, were not allowed). The grading rubric added ten additional points to evaluate business casual attire and an appropriate online setting.

Plan of Action Moving Forward:

During the AC 2025-2026, faculty will implement the following to drive further improvements to enhance the BGS program's student learning outcomes:

- In Measure 1.1, Resume resources and rubric will be updated to reflect new and relevant resume practices (e.g., no full address in resume header; ATS-compatible language; teach three C's of clear, concise, consistent; LinkedIn connectivity; etc.) A new lecture video will be recorded to help facilitate learning.
- In Measure 1.2, the cover letter draft assignment will be edited to require students to mark specific sections of their cover letter draft. On a second page in a Word document, students will copy their cover letter draft and highlight various sections to clarify intention. (1) In yellow, students will highlight their introduction with name, current position, and degree, (2) In italics, students will outline their goal for applying to the position, and (3) In bold, students will outline their previous experience, skills, and what makes them uniquely qualified for the position. Requiring students to highlight the different parts of their paragraphs will help them write with intention and ensure they meet the criteria according to the rubric. An example will be provided to help with instructional clarity.
- In Measure 1.3, the accompanying APA quiz will be updated to require a minimum of 5 full points (100%). This will help students who lose points on formatting issues on their first paragraph and final paper. Additionally, existing soft skills resources will be updated.
- In Measure 2.1, A clear rubric for each discussion board will be made to show clearly how points will be distributed. (e.g., a 30-point discussion board, students will see that (1) 15 points will be awarded for answering the prompt in a well-organized, concise way, (2) 5 points will be awarded per response to classmates, and (3) 5 points will be awarded for turning the posts in on time. Based on a pattern in previous AC years, the acceptable target will be lowered to 85% for AC 2025-2026.
- In Measure 2.2, a rubric will be created for the Soft Skills discussion board to show students distinctly where points will be awarded or subtracted. Having concise instructions with a clear rubric will help students address all prompts.
- In Measure 2.3, instructors will provide assignment instructions earlier in the semester. Students often struggle with identifying significant lessons learned from the capstone. Having the instructions listed earlier in the semester will give students additional time to consider the assignment requirements.
- In Measure 3.1, the course steward will upload additional resources on the importance of networking and how to network. Many of our traditional college

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seniors (ages 21-22) may be networking outside of the University for the first time. Additionally, a blank template of the career network will be made available for use that emphasizes each requirement and encourages full participation from the student.

- In Measure 3.2, an additional component will be added to the assignment instructions that will outline five specific questions for students to answer in paragraph format. These questions will be provided so students may better reflect on their interview and how it impacts their career exploration. This assignment will also be amended to require APA format.
- In Measure 3.3, Students will be given updated interview materials to help prepare for common interview questions. Common interview approaches (i.e., STAR method) will be outlined and a lecture video will be recorded to enhance learning. Providing clear methods for answering interview questions will help with student nervousness and allow for concise, intelligent answers. Additionally, a time limit of a minimum of 5 minutes per interview will be implemented. Some students finish their interview questions in under 3 minutes and do not allow enough time to fully engage with the interview practice.