

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

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.

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

- (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 2024-2025, the target was met ($81/88 = 92\%$). As a result, 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 now 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.

Based on the analysis of AC 2024-2025's results, the faculty made the following changes in AC 2025-2026 to drive the cycle of improvement and further student progress. Resume resources and the rubric were updated to reflect relevant and current resume practices, such as not requiring a full address in resume header, how to navigate ATS-compatible language in a resume, and LinkedIn connectivity. A new resource video was added to the course 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.

As a result of these changes in AC 2025-2026, the target was met. The target was achieved with 95% (65/68) of students earning a score of 75% or higher on the assessed

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

assignments using the established rubric.

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was met. Based on the AC 2025-2026 results analysis, the following changes will be made to drive improvement for AC 2026-2027. Instructions will be amended to clarify that resume templates with heavy graphics or column formatting will receive an automatic 5-point deduction. Examples of non-compliant templates will be shown. This grading change will be made to emphasize the importance of keeping resumes compliant with applicant tracking systems and help future graduates stay competitive in the job market. Preferred templates will be provided for use.

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 2024-2025, the target was met (85/88 students = 96%). In the previous year, the faculty implemented changes to the cover letter assignment that required resubmission of the letter for three or more spelling and grammar errors and an automatic 10-point deduction. These assignment expectations were adjusted to emphasize attention to detail, professionalism, and technical writing skills.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025, further changes were made for AC 2025-2026. The AC 2025-2026 cover letter draft assignment required students to mark specific sections of their cover letter draft. To promote intentional writing, students were required to annotate their cover letter drafts on the second page of their assignment document. An example was provided for students to help with instructional clarity. Requiring the students to identify and highlight the different parts of their paragraphs was meant to ensure they met the criteria according to the rubric and more deeply understood the segments of their cover letter for future writing and future job applications.

As a result of these changes, in AC 2025-2026, the target was met with 65/68 (94%) students scoring 75% or higher on the assessed assignments using the established rubric.

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was met at 94%. Based on the analysis of AC 2025-2026 results, in AC 2026-2027, the following changes will be made to help drive

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

improvement. Instructions will clarify that job listings found for the cover letter assignment should be realistically obtainable jobs with a General Studies degree. Past students have attempted to write cover letters for jobs requiring certifications and degrees they have not obtained (e.g., students will write, “As a recent graduate in Business Administration...”). The impact of this change will help graduates experience a practical and realistic example of writing a cover letter for employment post-graduation.

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 2024-2025, the target was not met (70/90 students = 78%). In AC 2024-2025, the assignment was amended to include thorough feedback on tone and APA formatting on the first paragraph assignment in which they introduce their three soft skills. This edit was reflected in an adjustment to the grading rubric. The acceptable target was also increased to 95% of students earn 80% or higher on the assignment assessed using an established rubric.

Based on the analysis of AC 2024-2025 results and the target not being met, the faculty implemented the following changes in AC 2025-2026. The accompanying APA quiz was modified to require a minimum of 5 full points (100%) before proceeding to the next step of the paper. Having students retake the quiz if they received lower than 100% was meant to help prevent losing points on formatting issues. The soft skills resources provided as supplemental material were updated.

As a result of these changes in AC 2025-2026, the target was not met (58/65 students = 89%).

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was not met. Based on the analysis of these results, in AC 2026-2027, changes will be made to drive continuous improvement. This assignment is typically given in two parts. Traditionally, students are required to submit a “first paragraph” from their essay two weeks before the full assignment is due to allow for feedback to be given. Instructions will be amended to require a full one page with APA format, introduction paragraph, and beginning of body paragraphs. This improvement will

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

allow instructors to provide better, more specific feedback and allow students to correct larger mistakes that are hard to catch in a one paragraph submission.

SLO 2. Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills.

Measure 2.1. (Direct – Skill) IDS 4020

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: Eighty-five percent (85%) 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 2024-2025, the target was not met. New expectations for the discussion boards were placed. To help drive improvement and reinforce assignment completion, the maximum possible points were increased from 60 to 90. Additionally, instructors outlined and highlighted all requirements to help students better understand the assignment.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the faculty implemented the following changes. First, a rubric for each discussion board was posted to show clearly how points are distributed. For example, for a 30-point discussion board, students can see that (1) 15 points are awarded for answering the prompt according to minimum word limit, grammar, and conciseness, (2) 5 points are awarded per response to classmates (10 points total), and (3) 5 points are awarded for turning the posts in on time. Based on a pattern in previous AC years, the acceptable target was lowered to 85% for AC 2025-2026.

Despite these changes made in AC 2025-2026, the target was not met (55/68 students = 81%).

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was not met. Based on the analysis of these results, in AC 2026-2027, two improvements will be made to the discussion boards to promote interaction and improve student engagement. First, for each discussion board, discussion prompts will be changed to give students' a choice between two questions/prompts related to the course material. Providing additional prompts will give students additional opportunities to share insights. Second, students will be asked to provide at least one

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

question in their required responses to classmates. Incorporating questions into peer responses will help promote dialogue and foster in-depth discussions.

Measure 2.2. (Direct – Skill) IDS 4030

Description: Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills by completing a Soft Skills discussion board forum prompt to prepare for the Soft Skills paper.

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

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

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: IDS 4030 faculty member

Findings: Target was not met.

Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, the target was not met. To help drive improvement and reinforce assignment completion, maximum possible points were increased. Additionally, instructors outlined and highlighted all requirements to help students better understand the discussion board assignments in IDS 4030. Students struggled to complete the discussion board prompts.

Based on the analysis of AC 2024-2025's results, the course steward and instructors implemented the following changes in AC 2025-2026. Comprehensive rubrics were created for each discussion board to show students distinctly where points were awarded and/or deducted.

As a result of these changes in AC 2025-2026, the target was not met (47/65 students = 72%).

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was not met. Based on the analysis of these results, in AC 2026-2027, the course steward will drive improvement by adjusting the requirements for the discussion. Adding requirements will assist students with completing their soft skills paper more efficiently. Currently, students are required to identify three soft skills they excel at and three soft skills that need improvement. Moving forward, students will be required to identify (1) their skills, (2) how they learned their skills and/or how they know their skills need adjustment, and (3) how the skills will attribute to their future career.

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

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

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 2024-25, the target was not met with 98% (88/90 students = 98%) earning 80% or above on this assignment. In AC 2024-2025, the course steward and instructors used the same assignment delivery format as years prior; however, the scaffolding assignments were re-designed to help the students identify which experiences they wanted to highlight earlier in the semester. The acceptable target was increased to 100% (earning at least 24/30 points or 80%). This assignment has been mandatory for the course as it helps students demonstrate critical thinking skills and reflect on all information provided in the capstone experience.

Based on the analysis of AC 2024-2025 results, the faculty implemented the following changes in AC 2025-2026. Assignment instructions were provided earlier in the semester to allow students additional time to reflect and consider which topics to discuss. Students seemed to struggle with identifying significant lessons learned from the capstone experience.

As a result of these changes in AC 2025-2026, the target was not met (62/65 students =95%).

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was not met (95%). The successful students from AC 2025-2026 (95% of the total number of students) reflect a decrease in completion from the past two years and suggests that additional changes may be necessary. Based on the analysis of these results, in AC 2026-2027, the course steward and instructors will drive improvement by including “checkpoints” throughout the course to help students collect evidence of their growth from the beginning to the end of the semester. Primary “checkpoints” will include a self-evaluation assignment in the beginning of the course and a mid-course evaluative survey. Adding these mini assignments will provide students with evidence to look back on for the final reflective essay, rather than attempting to remember everything at the end of the course.

SLO 3. Students will identify potential career opportunities.

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

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

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 instructors.

Findings: Target was met.

Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, the target was not met (75/90 students = 83%), despite a 6% percentage growth from the prior assessment cycle. Changes made for AC 2024-2025 included an adjustment to the instructions to clearly state requirements for point of contact in the assignment. In addition, the point value of the assignment increased from 20 to 30 points.

Based on analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the faculty implemented the following changes in AC 2025-2026. The course steward uploaded additional resources on the importance of networking and how to network, with an emphasis on finding employment opportunities and competence in professional communication. This change was implemented to help our traditional students (aged 21-23) that may be networking outside of the University for the first time. A blank template was made available for use that emphasized each requirement and encouraged full participation from the student.

As a result of these changes in AC 2025-2026, the target was met (59/65 students = 90%).

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was met (90%). Based on the analysis of these results, in AC 2025-2026, the course steward will add a component to the assignment that requires consideration and explanation for their career networking choices. Currently, students are required to choose one of five networking options to perform an informational interview. Three questions will be added to help students explore opportunities: (1) Which opportunity appears to be the best fit based on your current education and work experience? (2) Which opportunity in your list would be the most challenging to pursue? and (3) What experience or qualification do you feel you need to strengthen if you pursued employment at your chosen location? Adding questions for reflection in this assignment will strengthen student confidence in identifying realistic career options.

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

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 2024-2025, the following changes were implemented: (1) The informational interview was assigned 3-4 weeks in advance. (2) 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.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the faculty implemented the following changes in AC 2025-2026. The course steward and instructors added an additional component to the instructions that provided specific questions for students to answer in paragraph format so that students could properly reflect on their interview and how it impacts their career exploration. This assignment, which previously required no formatting, was now also required to be in APA format. These changes were made to reinforce writing standards and help prepare students for the expectations of graduate study or professional documentation.

As a result of these changes in AC 2025-2026, the target was met (60/65 students = 92%).

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was met (92%). Based on the analysis of these results, in AC 2026-2027, instructors will add a component to help students connect the assignment to their career goals. Students often complete the assignment by only narrating what occurred during the interview, with a small paragraph at the end to meet requirements. The additional component will require students to include an introductory paragraph to share their reasoning for choosing the individual to interview and what goals they had prior to the interview. The additional component will introduce a word limit for the introductory and closing paragraphs to improve student engagement with material.

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.

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

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 2024-2025, the target was met (83/88 students = 94%). During grading, IDS instructors paid special attention to student surroundings. Students were expected to follow standard virtual interviewing conduct (e.g., 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.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the faculty implemented the following change in AC 2025-2026. Students were given updated interview materials to help prepare for common interview questions. Common interview approaches (primarily the STAR method) were addressed, and a new lecture video was recorded to enhance learning. Additionally, a time limit of a minimum of 5 minutes per interview was implemented.

As a result of these changes in AC 2025-2026, the target was met (65/68 students = 95%).

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was met (95%). Based on the analysis of the results, in AC 2026-2027, the course steward will drive continuous improvement by requiring further analysis from students. Currently, students perform mock interviews and write a mock letter thanking the interviewer for the opportunity. The new component, turned in with the follow up mock letter, will require an analysis of their interview to encourage growth as a future job candidate. The added analysis will provide insight into what went well, what needs improvement, and how they may approach interviewing differently. Guiding questions to answer will be provided, and a new 200-word count minimum will be enforced.

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 2025-2026. These changes are based on the knowledge gained through the AC 2024-2025 results analysis.

- In Measure 1.1, resume resources and rubric were 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 video covering resume building was added to help

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

facilitate learning.

- In Measure 1.2, the cover letter draft assignment was edited to require students to mark specific sections of their cover letter draft. On the second page in a Word document, students were to copy their cover letter draft and highlight various sections to clarify intention. (1) In yellow, students highlight their introduction with name, current position, and degree, (2) In italics, students outline their goal for applying to the position, and (3) In bold, students outline their previous experience, skills, and what makes them uniquely qualified for the position. An example was provided to help with instructional clarity
- In Measure 1.3, the accompanying APA quiz was updated to require a minimum of 5 full points (100%). This was implemented to help students who lose points on formatting issues on their first paragraph and final paper. Additionally, existing soft skills resources were updated.
- In Measure 2.1, rubrics for each discussion board were made to show clearly how points are distributed. (e.g., a 30-point discussion board, students will see that (1) 15 points would be awarded for answering the prompt in a well-organized, concise way, (2) 5 points would be awarded per response to classmates, and (3) 5 points would be awarded for turning the posts in on time. Based on a continuing pattern in previous AC years, the acceptable target was lowered to 85%.
- In Measure 2.2, a rubric was 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 is intended to help students address all writing prompts.
- In Measure 2.3, instructors provided assignment instructions two weeks earlier in the semester than in previous years. Through assessment analysis, it was noted that students often struggle with identifying significant lessons learned from the capstone. Having the instructions listed earlier in the semester was intended to give students additional time to consider the assignment requirements
- In Measure 3.1, the course steward uploaded additional resources on the importance of networking and how to network. A blank template of the career network was made available for use that emphasized each requirement and encouraged full participation from the students.
- In Measure 3.2, an additional component was added to the assignment instructions that outlined five specific questions for students to answer in paragraph format. These questions were provided so students could better reflect on their interview and the impact an informational interview can have on career exploration. This assignment was amended to require APA format.
- In Measure 3.3, students were given updated interview materials to help prepare for common interview questions. Common interview approaches (*i.e.*, STAR method) were outlined, and a video was uploaded to enhance learning. Additionally, a time limit of a minimum of 5 minutes per interview was implemented.

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

Plan of Action Moving Forward:

During the AC 2026-2027, faculty will implement the following to drive further improvements to enhance the BGS program's student learning outcomes:

- In Measure 1.1, the instructions will be revised to state that any resume using excessive graphics or multi-column formatting will incur an automatic five-point penalty. Sample formats that do not meet requirements will be provided to illustrate what should be avoided. This change will be made to emphasize the importance of keeping resumes compliant with applicant tracking systems and help future graduates stay competitive in the job market.
- In Measure 1.2, new assignment instructions will clarify students should search for job listings that are realistically obtainable with a General Studies degree. Past students have attempted to write cover letters for jobs requiring certifications and degrees they have not obtained (e.g., students will write, "As a recent graduate in Business Administration..."). The impact of this change will help graduates experience a practical and realistic example of writing a cover letter for employment post-graduation.
- In Measure 1.3, the assignment will require a full one-page rough draft with APA formatting, an introduction paragraph, and the beginning of body paragraphs. This improvement will allow instructors to provide meaningful feedback and allow students to correct larger mistakes that are hard to catch in a single paragraph.
- In Measure 2.1, two enhancements will be made to improve student engagement. First, for each discussion board, two prompts will be offered to allow students options for discussion. Providing additional prompts will give students additional opportunities to share insights. Second, students will be asked to provide at least one question in their required responses to classmates. Asking direct questions will encourage dialogue and more in-depth discussion.
- In Measure 2.2, improvement will be achieved by adjusting the requirements for discussion. Adding requirements will assist students with completing their soft skills paper more efficiently. Moving forward, students will be required to identify (1) their skills, (2) how they learned their skills and/or how they know skills need adjustment, and (3) how the skills will attribute to their future career.
- In Measure 2.3, "checkpoints" will be implemented throughout the course to help students collect evidence of their growth from beginning to end. Primary "checkpoints" will include a self-evaluation assignment in the beginning of the course and a mid-course evaluative survey. Adding these brief assignments will provide students with material to look back on for the final reflective essay, rather than attempting to remember everything at the end of the course.
- In Measure 3.1, students will now be required to provide insight for their career networking choices in greater depth. Adding reflective questions in this assignment will strengthen student confidence in identifying career options and encourage

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

intentional choices.

- In Measure 3.2, an introductory paragraph will be required to share their reasoning for choosing their interviewee and what goals they had prior to the interview. The additional component will introduce a word limit for the introductory and closing paragraphs to improve student engagement with material. New requirements will help students' ability to link their interview with their career goals.
- In Measure 3.3, students will now submit an analysis of their interview to encourage growth as a future job candidate. The added analysis will provide insight into what went well, what needs improvement, and how they may approach interviewing differently. Guiding questions to answer will be provided, and a 200 minimum word count will be enforced.