

Assessment Cycle 2025 - 2026

Program: Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts (220)

College of Arts and Sciences

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

College of Arts and Sciences' Mission. College of Arts and Sciences' Mission. The College of Arts & Sciences, the largest college at Northwestern State University, is a diverse community of scholars, teachers, and students, working collaboratively to acquire, create, and disseminate knowledge through transformational, high-impact experiential learning practices, research, and service. The College strives to produce graduates who are productive members of society equipped with the capability to promote economic and social development and improve the overall quality of life in the region. The College provides an unequalled undergraduate education in the social and behavioral sciences, English, communication, journalism, media arts, biological and physical sciences, and the creative and performing arts, and at the graduate level in the creative and performing arts, English, TESOL, and Homeland Security. Uniquely, the College houses the Louisiana Scholars' College (the State's designated Honors College), the Louisiana Folklife Center, and the Creole Center, demonstrating its commitment to community service, research, and preservation of Louisiana's precious resources.

Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts Program Mission Statement: Recognizing the value of special programs for students with unusual backgrounds and abilities, this 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 BALA 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 count of students and/or courses attempted at NSU, students who are pursuing a Bachelor of Liberal Arts (BALA) degree are factored into, as appropriate, the assessment of student learning outcomes.

Student Learning Outcomes: Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts

SLO 1. Students will demonstrate appropriate writing skills.

Course Map: Tied to course syllabus objectives

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

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

Measure 1.1 (Direct – Knowledge)

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

Acceptable Target: Ninety percent (90%) of students earn a 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 not met.

Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, to help drive continuous improvement, the grading rubric was revised to include a couple of additional terms and conditions if the student makes three or more spelling and grammar mistakes on the final resume. This new rubric requires (1) resubmission and (2) an automatic 15-point deduction on this 40-point assignment. As a result, the target was met.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the course steward and instructors implemented the following changes in AC 2025-2026. Resume resources and rubric were updated to reflect modern, relevant resume practices (e.g., no full address in resume header; ATS-compatible language; teach three Cs of clear, concise, consistent; LinkedIn connectivity; etc.) A new lecture video was added to help facilitate learning.

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Despite these changes in AC 2025-2026, the target was not met, with 17 of 19 students (89.47%) scoring 75% or higher on the assessed assignment.

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was not met. Based on AC 2025-2026 results analysis, the following changes will be made to drive improvement in AC 2026-2027. Assignment instructions will be revised to specify that resumes using templates with heavily designed multi-column layouts and unnecessary graphics will automatically incur a 5-point deduction. Examples of templates with non-ATS compliant designs will be included for reference to know what students should avoid. This grading adjustment is intended to reinforce the importance of creating resumes that are compatible with applicant tracking systems and to better prepare future graduates for success in the job market. Recommended resume templates will also be provided.

Measure 1.2 (Direct – Knowledge)

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

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 not met

Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, the target was met regarding the construction of a cover letter with 21 of 23 students (91%) earning 75% or higher. The AC 2024-2025 cover letter grading rubric introduced a new condition that if three or more spelling and grammar errors are detected, it will require (1) a resubmission and (2) an automatic 10-point deduction on this 25-point assignment.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the course steward and instructors implemented the following changes in AC 2025-2026. The cover letter grading rubric introduced new instructions that required students to mark specific sections of their cover letter draft. Students were instructed to draft a cover letter and highlight sections to clarify intention. Requiring students to highlight the different components of their paragraphs helped them identify all necessary parts according to the rubric and taught the importance of each section.

As a result of these changes, in AC 2025-2026, the target was not met with 17 of 19 (89.47%) students scoring 75% or higher on the assignment.

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was not met. Based on the analysis of the AC 2025-2026 results, in AC 2026-2027, the course steward will drive continuous

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improvement by updating assignment guidelines to emphasize that job postings selected for the cover letter assignment must reflect positions realistically obtainable with a Liberal Arts degree. Previous semesters showed several students submitting cover letters for positions requiring credentials, certifications, or degrees they did not possess, requiring a re-submission of the assignment. This improvement will provide students with more authentic and practical experience in developing professional cover letters that align with their post-graduation goals.

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.

Acceptable Target: Ninety-five percent (95%) of students earn a score of 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 (90%).

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 with 17 of the 21 (81%) students failing to earn at least 90% on the assessed assignments. To drive improvement, instructors required all students to submit an earlier, mandatory assignment of their first paragraph, and feedback was provided to students earlier, helping them to construct their papers concisely and with fewer difficulties. The target was increased to 95%.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the course steward and instructors implemented the following changes in AC 2025-2026. To enhance the quality of the assignment, the instructors still required all students to submit their first paragraph, which included the three soft skills they addressed in their paper. Instructors reiterated the importance of this early assignment in the assignment instructions. Feedback was provided to students earlier, helping them to construct their papers concisely with fewer difficulties. This edit was reflected in an adjustment to the grading rubric and the assignment instructions. The target was increased to 95%. Students often struggle with APA formatting and reflection of their soft skills in this assignment.

Despite these changes, in AC 2025-2026, the target was not met (16/18 students = 89%).

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was not met as only 89% of all students earned the target score. Based on the analysis of AC 2025-2026 results, in AC 2026- 2027, the course steward will amend both stages of the assignment. Students will now be required to submit at least one full-page rough draft of their paper with proper APA formatting, an introductory paragraph, and the initial body paragraph. Expanding these parameters will give instructors the ability to provide more detailed feedback and provide the students with additional time to correct mistakes on their final paper.

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SLO 2. Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills.

Course Map: Tied to the course syllabus objectives

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

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

Measure 2.1. (Direct – Skill) IDS 4020

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

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 (18/23 students = 86%). In AC 2024-2025, the course steward and instructors emphasized rubric requirements. Instructors reinforced the assignment description of completing the discussion boards accurately. Maximum points were increased from 60 to 90 points to help elevate the importance of these three discussion board assignments. Despite these changes, the students struggled with following instructions for the forum posts and engaging with the discussion material.

Based on the results of the AC 2024-2025 analysis, the course steward and instructors implemented the following changes in AC 2025-2026. Instructors created a rubric for each discussion board to show clearly how points were distributed. The new rubric showed clearly where points were taken away or given. Based on the pattern of unmet targets in previous AC years, the acceptable target was lowered to 85% for AC 2025-2026.

Despite these changes in AC 2025-2026, the target was not met (13/19 students = 68%). Three (3) of the 6 students scoring below 80% earned scores of 0% as there was no submission ever made.

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was not met (68%). Based on the analysis of these results, in AC 2026-2027, the course steward and instructors will drive improvement by strengthening participation and encouraging more meaningful engagement in discussion boards for this entirely online capstone experience. Two instructional changes will be implemented: (1) Each discussion board will now include two prompt options connected with the course module to allow students to choose the topic they feel more interested in

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or more prepared to discuss, (2) Students will be required to include at least one question when responding to a classmate's post. This improvement is designed to encourage continued conversation and deepen interaction.

Measure 2.2. (Direct – Skill / Ability)

Description: Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills by completing a Soft Skills discussion board forum prompt.

Acceptable Target: Eighty percent (80%) of students will produce a Soft Skills 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 met.

Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, the target was not met as 15/21 students (71%). The results followed an improvement to the prompt that highlighted requirements and increased the total value of points earned.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the course steward and instructors implemented the following changes in AC 2025-2026 to help drive improvement. Rubrics for discussion boards were created to show students distinctly where points were deducted. Having concise instructions with a clear rubric helped students address issues that resulted in a deduction of points.

As a result of these changes in AC 2025-2026, the acceptable target was met (15/18 students = 83%).

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was met. Based on the analysis of these results, in AC 2026-2027, the course steward will drive improvement by adjusting discussion assignment expectations. An updated prompt for this discussion board will help students with reflection and the development process of their paper. Under the adjusted assignment directions, students will be expected to detail (1) how their skills developed, (2) which skills need adjustment, and (3) how their skills are relevant to their career of choice.

Measure 2.3 (Direct – Skill / Ability)

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.

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Acceptable Target: All (100%) students will produce a score of 25/30 points, earning at least eighty-five percent (85%).

Ideal Target: All students will pass the assessments with a score of at least eighty-five percent (85%).

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 met with 20 out of 21 (95%) students who scored at least 85% on their final reflective essay. The course steward made a few modifications to enhance student learning. Instructors used the same assignment delivery format, addressed the need for additional student feedback (requiring 3 lessons learned and one topic to expand on), and kept the final reflection assignment mandatory. The acceptable target was increased to 100% (all students must produce a score of at least 85%).

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the course steward and instructors made changes in AC 2025-2026. The reflection essay was assigned earlier in the semester to allow students additional time to consider the course material and assignment requirements.

As a result of these changes in AC 2025-2026, the target was not met (17/18 students = 94%).

Decision: In AC 2025-26, the target was not met (94%). Based on the analysis of these results, in AC 2026-2027, the course steward and instructors will drive improvement to reach the ideal target. Structured “checkpoints” will be incorporated into the beginning and middle of the course to help students document and recognize their growth over time. These “checkpoints” will include an introductory self-assessment and a brief midterm reflection survey. These small activities will provide students with reference points they can use when completing the final reflection essay rather than relying solely on memory at the end of the course.

SLO 3. Students will identify potential career opportunities.

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

Measure 3.1. (Direct – Knowledge)

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

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

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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 2024-2025, the target was not met with 86% (18/21) of assessed Liberal Arts students successfully identifying relevant career networking agencies via their IDS 4030 class assignment with a score of 85% (or higher). The course steward tailored the career network assignment directions to clarify instructions for point of contact name and job title. The same adjustment was made for graduate programs. In addition, the point value increased from 20 to 30 points to drive home the importance of the networking assignment.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the course steward and instructors implemented the following changes in AC 2025-2026. The course steward uploaded resources on the importance of networking and how to network for career building and exploration. A blank template was made available for use that emphasizes each requirement and encouraged full participation from students.

As a result of these changes, in AC 2025-2026, the target was not met (15/18 students = 83%).

Decision: In 2025-2026, the target was not met (83%). Based on the AC 2025-2026 results, in AC 2026-2027, the course steward and instructors will implement the following. To strengthen career exploration and self-assessment within the assignment, instructions will be amended to include a reflective component designed to encourage deeper evaluation of their professional goals. New questions will ask students which opportunity to network best works for their professional goals, which networking opportunity may be the most challenging to pursue, and identify any experience or qualification that would need to be strengthened.

Measure 3.2. (Direct - Knowledge)

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

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.

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Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, the ideal target was met at 86% (18/21 students). To drive improvement, students were instructed to e-mail the instructor and/or participate in a discussion board with details on their assignment plans.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the course steward and instructors implemented the following changes in AC 2025-2026. An additional component was added to the instructions that required a set of five specific questions to answer in paragraph format. These questions were designed to help students reflect on their informational interview material and how it relates to their future career. For AC 2025-2026, the assignment also required APA formatting.

As a result of these changes in AC 2025-2026, the target was met (18/18 students = 100%).

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was met (100%). Based on the AC 2025-2026 result analysis, in AC 2026-2027, the course steward and instructors will make the following changes to drive the cycle of improvement and encourage more thoughtful engagement. A new requirement will be added for students to write a paragraph detailing their reasoning for choosing the interviewee and their goals prior to the interview, as well as a word limit for their reflective opening and closing paragraphs.

Measure 3.3 (Direct – Knowledge)

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

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 acceptable target was met at 95% (22/23). To help drive continuous improvement in AC 2024-2025, instructors added a component to the rubric that required professional dress code. Students were graded accordingly for professional interview attire, interview location, and interview etiquette.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the course steward and instructors implemented the following changes in AC 2025-2026. Students were given updated and thorough interview resources. Up-to-date methods for career interviewing (*i.e.*, STAR method) will be enforced in the assignment instructions, and a lecture video will be recorded. Providing clear methods for answering interview questions helped student nervousness and allowed concise answers. A time minimum of 5 minutes per interview was

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implemented because of students often taking only 2 to 3 minutes per interview.

As a result of these changes in AC 2025-2026, the target was met (18/19 students = 95%) with only one non-submission of the assignment.

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was met. Based on the analysis of AC 2025-2026 results, in AC 2026-2027, the following changes will be made to drive continuous improvement. An additional requirement will be introduced that asks students to critically evaluate their interview performance. This improvement will help support student development as they move on after graduation. Guiding questions will be provided for students to consider what went well during the interview, what needs improvement, and how they may approach interviewing in the future. An additional 200-word minimum will be implemented.

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 modern, relevant resume practices (e.g., no full address in resume header; ATS-compatible language; teach three Cs of clear, concise, consistent; LinkedIn connectivity; etc.) A new lecture video with the updated information was uploaded to help facilitate learning.
- In Measure 1.2, the assignment was amended to require students to identify specific sections of their cover letter draft. Students were instructed to copy their cover letter draft and highlight various sections to clarify intention in writing. Requiring students to highlight the different parts of their paragraphs assisted with intentional writing and ensured they met the criteria according to the rubric. An example was provided.
- In Measure 1.3, the accompanying APA quiz was updated to require a minimum score received of 5 full points (100%) before submitting their first Soft Skills paragraph assignment. This helped students who lose points on APA formatting issues. Existing soft skills resources were updated.
- In Measure 2.1, a clearer rubric for each discussion board was made to show clearly how points were distributed. The acceptable target will be lowered to 85% for AC 2025-2026 based on a pattern of low participation in this assignment.
- In Measure 2.2, a rubric for the Soft Skills discussion board was implemented to show students distinctly where points were awarded or subtracted. Having concise instructions with a clear rubric helped students address all prompts.
- In Measure 2.3, instructors provided assignment instructions earlier in the semester. Students struggled with identifying significant lessons learned from the capstone. Having the instructions listed earlier in the semester gave students

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additional time to consider assignment requirements.

- In Measure 3.1, additional resources were uploaded on the importance of networking and how to network for career building and exploration. A blank template was made available for use that emphasized each requirement and encouraged full participation from the student.
- In Measure 3.2, an additional assignment component was added that provided five questions to answer in paragraph format so that students could better reflect on their interview and how it impacted their career exploration. This assignment was amended to require APA format.
- In Measure 3.3, students were provided with updated interview resources. Up-to-date methods for career interviewing were incorporated into the assignment instructions, and a lecture video was uploaded. Additionally, a time limit of a minimum of 5 minutes per interview was implemented.

Plan of Action Moving Forward: During AC 2026-2027, faculty will implement the following to drive further improvements to enhance the BA LA program's student learning outcomes based on the results analyzed from AC 2025-2026:

- In Measure 1.1, the instructions will be revised to state that any resume using excessive graphics and multi-column formatting will receive an automatic five-point deduction. Sample formats that do not meet requirements will be provided to illustrate what should be avoided. Approved templates with ATS-compliant layouts will be provided.
- In Measure 1.2, new assignment instructions will clarify how students should search for job listings that are realistically obtainable with a Liberal Arts degree. The impact of this change will help graduates experience a practical example of writing a cover letter for employment post-graduation.
- In Measure 1.3, the assignment will now 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 more comprehensive feedback and give students ample time to correct larger mistakes (that could result in a loss of points) that are harder for instructors to spot in a single paragraph.
- In Measure 2.1, two improvements will be made to enhance student engagement. First, for each discussion board, two prompts will be offered to allow students options for discussion. Providing additional prompts will give students the ability to choose a topic they are more interested in or more prepared to discuss. 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, a requirement will be added to assist students with completing their soft skills paper more efficiently and to provide more prompts to discuss. Moving forward, students will be required to identify (1) their skills, (2) how they

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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 survey over goals and growth. Adding these brief assignments will provide students with material to look back on for the final reflective essay, rather than attempting to recall the entire course during the last week of class.
- In Measure 3.1, instructions will be amended to include a reflective component designed to encourage deeper evaluation of their professional goals. New questions will ask students which opportunity to network best works for their professional goals, which networking opportunity may be the most challenging to pursue, and identify any experience or qualification that would need to be strengthened.
- In Measure 3.2, a new requirement will be added for students to write a paragraph detailing their reasoning for choosing the interviewee and their goals prior to the interview, as well as a word limit for their reflective opening and closing paragraphs.
- In Measure 3.3, an additional requirement will be introduced that asks students to evaluate critically their interview performance. This improvement will help support student development as they move on after graduation. Guiding questions will be provided for students to consider what went well during the interview, what needs improvement, and how they may approach interviewing in the future. An additional a 200-word minimum will be implemented.