

Assessment Cycle AC 2025-2026

Program: Scholars College Liberal Arts (BA) (820)

Louisiana Scholars' College

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 unequaled 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.

Louisiana Scholars' College Mission Statement: The College's mission is to provide a quality, customized, undergraduate education firmly grounded in the liberal arts and sciences to a diverse population of well-qualified, highly motivated students by rethinking the traditional liberal arts curriculum and developing innovative approaches to honors education.

Louisiana Scholars' College Purpose: As an academic unit, the Louisiana Scholars' College is responsible for:

- administering, delivering, and enhancing courses for the honors core curriculum (the Common Curriculum), which replaces the University Core for students in the College.
- administering, setting standards, delivering, and enhancing courses for the Minor in Liberal Arts and the individualized Major in Liberal Arts and its honors concentrations: Business, Technology and Society; Classical Studies; Fine and

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Performing Arts; Foreign Languages; Humanities and Social Thought; Philosophy, Politics, and Economics; and Scientific Inquiry.

- collaborating with other departments to offer joint honors versions of 30 traditional majors, each to include the Common Curriculum, a senior thesis, and honors level major courses, as appropriate in addition to the required courses in each major, and Honors Certificates.
- mentoring students individually in the production of the senior thesis.
- advising all honors students on curricular choices to prepare them for the accelerated Master's programs and other advanced study or employment.

Students completing a concentration in the major in Liberal Arts use a combination of courses offered in the Scholars' College and approved courses offered in other departments or through study abroad.

Due to the variety of degree options in the College and the flexibility of the major in Liberal Arts, sample sizes are too small for a meaningful evaluation of Student Learning Outcomes related to specific content imparted in any of these majors. (SLOs related to content in specific joint majors are evaluated in the home departments.) The following assessment evaluates skills-based student learning outcomes common to the major in Liberal Arts and all the joint majors administered by the College as demonstrated in courses offered in the College.

Methodology: The assessment process includes:

1. evaluation of components of single assignments in courses required of all students in the College
2. evaluation of the comprehensive final exam in skills-based courses satisfying options in the Common Curriculum
3. summative evaluation of the Senior Thesis defense
4. summative evaluation of the Archival Senior Thesis

Student Learning Outcomes:

SLO 1. Demonstrate effective oral communication skills.

Course Map: Tied to course syllabi below through first semester presentation and Thesis Defense.

Measure 1.1. (Direct–Skill/Ability–oral communication)

Students make oral presentations of their term papers in SCRT 181W and the 2000-level co-classes, which are assessed using the AACU *Oral Communication* rubric. The target is for a minimum of 75% of students to earn an average rating of 3 or higher.

Finding: Target met.

Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, the target was not met, although scores did show improvement over the previous year's results. The assessment covered 37 students. The

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only subscale where fewer than 75% of students scored a 3 or 4 was *Support* (65%). It was decided that faculty would spend more time discussing when and how to use and document scholarly sources in a formal presentation. As a result of these changes, in AC 2025-2026, the target was met. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of students earned an average rating higher than 3.

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was met. In the upcoming AC 2026-2027, faculty will spend the same time discussing documenting scholarly sources in a formal presentation. This will improve students' ability to use and document sources in their formal presentations. We will see whether these improvements are made in another year before making any changes. Changes may include using a new rubric for assessment.

Measure 1.2. (Direct–Skill/Ability–oral communication)

Students present oral defenses of their theses which are assessed using the summative rubric for the department, modified in Spring 2017. The target is for a minimum of 75% of students enrolled in the second semester of thesis to progress to the point where they can defend their work and earn a rating of *Very Good* or higher. Each rating is based on specific levels of performance, with examples given in a departmental rubric. Each defense is rated by the first and second readers as well as the Director of the College. Students who are enrolled but do not successfully defend are rated *Unsatisfactory*.

Finding: Target was met.

Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, the target was met. All (100%) of the students averaged “Very Good” or better on their defenses. Based on the AC 2024-2025 results analysis, the faculty decided to maintain the practices that were started in the previous cycle to drive the cycle of improvement in 2025-2026. These included hardening deadlines to encourage revision of the thesis and provide opportunities for practice of the presentation. Seniors were also encouraged to present their thesis work in progress at both undergraduate and professional conferences. In 2025-2026, the target was met. Seven (7) students defended their theses. One student received “Very Good” from both their readers. The other students received only “Excellent” or “Superlative” ratings.

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was met. We have met the target two years in a row. For the upcoming year, 2026-2027, we will change the target to a minimum of 75% of students enrolled in the second semester of thesis to progress to the point where they can defend their work and earn a rating of *Excellent* or higher. This is a standard we met this year. Eighty-five percent (85%) of students earned a rating of *Excellent* or higher. We will consider raising this standard again next year or introducing a new measure.

SLO 2. Demonstrate effective written communication skills.

Course Map: Tied to course syllabi through first semester term paper and Archival Thesis Submission

Measure 2.1 (Direct–Skill/Ability–written communication)

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Students write 4,000-word term papers in SCRT 181W and the 2000-level co-courses, which are assessed using the AACU *Written Communication* rubric. The target is for a minimum of 75% of students to earn a rating of 3 or higher on each individual subscale and on the average of the five subscales.

Finding: Target not met.

Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, the target was not met. The assessment covered 37 students, of which 35% scored 3 or higher on each individual subscale; 51% scored 3 or higher on the average of their five subscales.

The AC 2024-2025 cohort was less well-prepared to study writing than previous cohorts; 9 of 37 (24%) were taking SCRT 181W without having credit for ENGL 1010 (usually through dual enrollment, ACT scores, or AP credit). Only 2 of 9 students without ENGL 1010 credit (22%) met the performance standard; of those with credit, 17 of 28 students (61%) averaged 3 or higher on their average score. The proper sequencing of courses resulted in a significantly higher success rate (2-proportion z test, $p = .022$), although the better prepared group did not meet the target either. To ensure that students are prepared for SCRT 181W, they will not be allowed to register for it unless they have credit for ENGL 1010. Students without that credit will take ENGL 1010 in the fall and SCRT 181W in the spring.

In AC 2025-2026, the target was not met. The assessment covered 70 students, including students who took ENGL 1010 in the fall and SCRT 181W during the spring semester, based on our revised advising guidance. Fifty-five percent (55%) scored 3 or higher on each individual subscale; seventy-seven percent (77%) scored 3 or higher on the average of their five scales. There was improvement in both components of the measure - one exceeded 75% - but the conjunction of these components did not meet the target.

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was not met. Based on the AC 2025-2026 results analysis, the following changes will be made to drive improvement. The target will be maintained at 75% of students scoring 3 or higher on each individual subscale and on the average of the five subscales. Students will be advised not to take SCRT 181W unless they have credit for ENGL 1010. Students performed most poorly in the *Sources and Evidence* subscale, with 30% of students scoring less than 3. To address this deficiency, how to find and document scholarly sources will be emphasized. This will improve the student's ability to use credible, high-quality, and relevant sources to support their ideas. The assessment method and/or rubric may also be updated.

Measure 2.2 (Direct–Skill/Ability–written communication)

Students will submit the archival copy of their written theses which will also be assessed using an established rubric. The target is for a minimum of 70% of students to earn a rating of *Excellent* or higher.

Finding: Target not met.

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Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, the target was not met. Four (4) out of 7 students (57%) averaged *Excellent* or higher on the archival thesis. As they did in the previous AC, faculty reported that students struggled with meeting their deadlines; this may have impacted the quality of the archival copy by compressing the time students had to complete revisions.

In 2025-2026, the target was not met. Four (4) out of 7 (57%) students averaged a rating of *Excellent* (no students averaged *Superlative*). This is the same score as last AC.

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was not met. Based on the analysis of the 2025-2026 results, the faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026-2027, the target of 70% of students earning a rating of *Excellent* or above will be retained. We will try different methods to encourage students to complete every step of their thesis on time. We tried to motivate students to form support groups, but there was no interest. It is not clear how extensively punitive measures like lower grades were implemented. A stronger emphasis will be placed on presentations at public venues. The one thesis student who presented at multiple venues completed their document on time and received an average rating of *Excellent* on their archival copy. Having these presentations as goals will help them meet the other deadlines in the thesis process.

SLO 3. Question, analyze, evaluate, and reconcile conflicting perspectives.

Course Map: Tied to course syllabus for SCTT 1820: Texts and Traditions II: The Shaping of Western Thought.

Measure 3.1 (Direct – knowledge)

In Texts and Traditions II: The Shaping of Western Thought (SCTT 1820), students complete a quiz with questions from the AACU Critical Thinking rubric. The goal was to have the average quiz score to be at least 90%.

Finding: Target was met.

Analysis: Based on the analysis of the AC 2023-2024 results, the faculty decided to create a quiz for AC 2024-2025 that was rooted in the AACU Critical Thinking rubric. This was meant to address the considerable differences in ratings from professor-to-professor. The goal was to have the average quiz score to be at least 90%.

As a result of these changes, in AC 2024-2025, the target was not met. The goal was to have the average score to be at least 90% on the quiz designed to test this SLO. The average score was 85%. In AC 2025-2026, some questions in the quiz were revised for clarity, and the quiz became a part of the student's grade in hopes that it would encourage both more participation and better performance. The target was met. The average score was 90%.

Decision: In 2025-2026, the target was met. Based on the analysis of the 2025-2026 results, the faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026-2027. There will be

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a change in the method of delivery for the quiz. Faculty worry about the validity of these scores. The quiz was delivered online. It is remarkably easy to use AI to answer the questions. Quizzes will now be delivered in-person during class time. The AACU Critical Thinking rubric's connection to the quiz will be revisited; a better articulation of the connection between the quiz and the SLO will be given.

SLO 4. Demonstrate quantitative and problem-solving skills.

Course Map: Tied to course syllabi for Applied Statistics (SSTA 3810-01N) and Applied Calculus 1 and 2 (SMAT 2000 and 2010)

Measure 4.1. (Direct – skill/ability).

In the core mathematics course Applied Statistics (SSTA 3810), 75% of students will earn a B or better on a comprehensive assessment of their knowledge and skills. The course's final assessment is a comprehensive evaluation of basic descriptive statistics, fundamental hypothesis testing, and advanced topics; analyses are completed in Excel. Students choose and perform the appropriate analyses and interpret their results in the context of the problems.

Finding: Target not met.

Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, the target was not met; seven (7) of 17 students (41.2%) scored 80% or better on the final. Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the faculty implemented the following changes in AC 2025-2026. Since students prefer to study from worked examples rather than practicing problems and then checking their work, course materials were consolidated to group similar worked problems together, thus reducing the volume of supplemental materials offered and making it easier for students to find the topics they need. A review of the LMS logs for the 9 consolidated documents revealed that an average of 9 of 16 students viewed these files, with a range of 4 to 13.

SSTA 3810 Final Exam AC 2024-2025		
score	freq.	%
< 140	6	38%
140-149	1	6%
150-159	2	13%
160-169	2	13%
170-179	2	13%
180-189	2	13%
190-200	1	6%
total	16	

Unfortunately, in AC 2025-2026, the target was not met. The target remained for 75% of students to earn a score of 80% or better on the comprehensive final exam. Only 7 of 16 students (43.8%) performed at the desired level, significantly lower than the target ($p = .007$). This year, the score on the ANOVA project was strongly correlated with the final exam score ($r^2 = 61.7\%$); it also was significantly related to the homework assignments, Exam 1, and Exam 2. Adding additional in-class instruction and supplemental materials on factorial and nested ANOVA, appeared to contribute to success on other topics. Scores on the one-way ANOVA question on the final exceeded all hypothesis test questions except Chi-square and the independent samples t-test.

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was not met. Based on the AC 2025-2026 results analysis, the faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026-2027 to drive the

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cycle of improvement. Additional solved problems will be added to the course materials from previous exams and solutions to further organize supplemental materials and examples for use in class. This will allow for more effective studying which should result in better comprehension of the material and performance on the assessment. The courses assessed for this SLO will also be expanded.

Measure 4.2. (Direct – skill/ability).

Course map: In the core mathematics courses, Applied Calculus 1 (SMAT 2000) and Applied Calculus 2 (SMAT 2010), 75% of students will earn a B or better on a comprehensive assessment of their knowledge and skills.

Finding: Target was met for SMAT 2000; target was not met for SMAT 2010.

Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, only three students enrolled in SMAT 2000 due to first year science majors opting to delay taking calculus for a year. Two students met the performance standard, so the target was not met. Those two students were only required to take one semester of calculus and chose not to continue. Since the third student must earn a grade of C or better before taking SMAT 2010, Applied Calculus 2 was not offered.

Based on the AC 2024-2025 analysis results, the faculty implemented the following changes in AC 2025-2026 to drive the cycle of improvement. To ensure that students are prepared to complete SMAT 2000, we advised incoming students without at least 3 hours of MATH or SMAT credit with a grade of B or better, or an ACT Math subscore of 27 or higher to delay taking calculus until their second year. These requirements will be submitted to the Curriculum Review Committee to make them formal prerequisites for SMAT 2000. Materials were selected to cover additional content for second order linear homogeneous differential equations and our linear algebra topics for Spring 2026.

SMAT 2000 Final Exam AC 2025-2026		
score	freq.	%
< 140	1	12.5%
140-149	0	0.0%
150-159	1	12.5%
160-169	2	25.0%
170-179	2	25.0%
180-189	2	25.0%
190-200	0	0.0%
total	8	

As a result of those changes in AC 2025-2026, 6 of 8 students (75%) scored 80% or higher on the comprehensive final for SMAT 2000, meeting the target. Only 4 students continued in SMAT 2010. Two of these scored above 90% on their final; the other two scored between 69 and 71%. Thus, the target was not met. These two individuals had difficulties with basic material from SMAT 2000 or the first unit of material in SMAT 2010 (trigonometric functions).

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was met for SMAT 2000, but not for SMAT 2010. Based on the AC 2025-2026 analysis results, the faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026-2027 to drive the cycle of

improvement. To ensure that students are prepared to complete SMAT 2000, we will institute a formal prerequisite in the university catalog of 3 hours of MATH or SMAT with a grade of B or better, or an ACT Math subscore of 27 or higher. These changes will improve the students' ability to apply basic concepts correctly in novel situations, making

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both courses more effective and pushing the cycle of improvement forward. Additional review material will be added to reinforce prerequisite concepts from SMAT 2010 and fundamental concepts on trigonometric functions. The courses assessed for this SLO will also be expanded.

SLO 5. Identify connections within and between the sciences, mathematics, humanities, and the arts.

Course Map: Tied to course syllabus for SCTT 2820 – Texts and Traditions IV and interdisciplinary courses.

Measure 5.1. (Direct – Knowledge)

In SCTT 2820 (Texts and Traditions IV), students will make connections within and between the sciences, mathematics, humanities, and the arts in a summative essay assignment, using works from throughout all four courses in the Texts and Traditions sequence, courses required of all students. The target is that 75% of students will earn an average score of 3.0 or better using the AACU Values rubric for Inquiry and Analysis.

Finding: Target met.

Analysis: In 2024-25, the target was not met. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the students scored 3 or better in all categories. This was an improvement over the previous year when only 40% of students achieved this score at least. Students performed best in *Existing Knowledge* and *Analysis*; they were similarly weak in the other categories. Based on the AC 2024-2025 analysis results, the following changes were made to drive improvement in AC 2025-2026. The faculty gave emphasis to each element of the rubric. One way this was done was by requiring each element to be addressed in the students' proposals for the summative essays. This assignment was proceeded by faculty-led guidance on the importance and meaning of each element. As a result of these changes in 2025-2026, the target was met. Eighty-five percent (85%) of the students scored 3 or higher. The students were strongest in *Topic Selection* and similarly weaker in all the other areas.

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was met. Based on the AC 2025-2026 analysis results, the following changes will be made to drive improvement in AC 2026-2027. Faculty will emphasize each element of the rubric. Faculty will consider revising the standard if this improvement continues. Faculty will also consider an alternative rubric for assessing the essay.

Measure 5.2. (Direct-Knowledge)

Using the 'interdisciplinary' courses in the Humanities and Social Thought Concentration of the Liberal Arts Major, students will be assessed on a question which asks them to identify connections within and between the sciences, mathematics, humanities, and the arts. The list of courses currently includes SART 3820; SECO 3840, 3850, 3860; SHIS 3700, 3710; SLSC 3800, 3810, 3820, 3830, or 4820; or SPHI 3910. As a degree requirement, these

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courses are offered on rotation every year. The target is that 75% of students will earn an average score of 3.0 or better using the AACU Values rubric for Inquiry and Analysis.

Finding: Courses not assessed

Analysis: In 2024-2025, two courses in this category were taught and assessed, SLSC 4890 (Advanced Readings in Interdisciplinary Studies) and SLSC 4820 (Sociobiology and the Evolution of Sex). The target was met, with five (5) of 6 students (83%) averaging 3 or above on the six-item metric. All students scored 3 or above on each of the four measures; one student scored less than 3 on *Existing Knowledge, Research, or Views*; and two students scored below a 3 on *Limitations and Implications*. In 2025-2026, none of the listed courses were taught, so the outcomes were not assessed.

Decision: The decision was made for AC 2025-2026, based on 2024-2025 analysis results that for the interdisciplinary courses additional emphasis will be placed on limitations and implications for the student's research writing. Courses from the list are scheduled for 2026-2027. This decision will be implemented for those courses, and the outcomes will be assessed in those courses.

SLO 6. Find, evaluate, and use appropriate information for scholarship from both the electronic and print media

Course Map: Tied to course syllabi for SBUS 4000/SLSC 4000 Thesis Research Methods

Measure 6.1. (Direct – Knowledge)

Using the annotated bibliography and the final proposal, students will be assessed on their ability to find scholarly sources for their theses, select those which are appropriate for their topics, and use them to support their final proposals, as stated in the SLO. Seventy-five percent (75%) of students will score an average of 3 or better on the AACU Values rubric for *Information Literacy*.

Finding: Classes not assessed

Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, 7 of 11 students averaged a 3 or higher (64%) on the rubric which did not meet the target but was a significant improvement over AC 2023-2024 when only 2 of 7 students met the target ($p = .073$). In terms of individual items on the rubric, 9 of 11 students (82%) scored a 3 or higher on the item, *Access the Needed Information* and 9 of 11 (82%) scored 3 or higher on *Access and Use Information Ethically and Legally*. They were least successful in *Using Information Effectively to Accomplish a Specific Purpose*, largely due to a failure to use a significant number of their sources or a failure to blend ideas from multiple sources; only 6 of 11 (55%) scored 3 or higher on this item. Data for these classes was not submitted for 2025-2026, so they were not assessed.

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the classes were not assessed because the data from these classes were not submitted. Changes will be made in AC 2025-2026 to ensure that the data is submitted. The decisions made for AC 2025-2026 will be implemented in 2026-2027. The faculty will more clearly delineate the various steps involved in Information

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Literacy: identifying the information required to address the topic, finding and accessing that information, critically evaluating the quality of the information, using the information to support their argument, and blending information from more than one source; and documenting their use of the ideas of others in a style appropriate for their discipline. A new assignment will be added to SLSC/SBUS 4000 in which students will document their search strategies and their choices related to the rubric items. In addition, students will be required to meet with their first readers to discuss the appropriateness of their sources and how to best use them to support their arguments, including blending ideas from more than one source.

Measure 6.2. (Direct – Knowledge)

Using the thesis exam copy, students will be assessed on their ability to find scholarly sources for their theses, select those which are appropriate for their topics, use them to support their final arguments, and document their use in a style appropriate to their discipline. Seventy-five percent (75%) of students will score an average of 3 or better on the AACU Values rubric for *Information Literacy*.

Course Map: Tied to course syllabi for SBTS/SBUS/SFPA/SHUM/SSCI 482T Thesis

Finding: Target was met.

Analysis: The target was met in 2024-2025. The target was met again in 2025-2026 with 85% of the students averaging 3 or better on the AACU Values rubric for *Information Literacy*. Students were strongest on *Access and Use Information Ethically and Legally*. They were least successful on *Determine the Extent of Information Needed* and *Access the Needed Information*.

Decision: In AC 2025-2026, the target was met. Based on the analysis of the 2025-2026 results, the faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026-2027. For AC 2026-2027, the target will be raised to 85%. Faculty across the curricula will be made aware of this new target and the students' weaknesses in AC 2025-2026 so they can most effectively reflect on how they can promote the information literacy of our students. The rubric used for this assessment may be changed.

Comprehensive summary of key evidence of improvement 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 analysis of AC 2024-2025 results.

- In Measure 1.1, the faculty spent more time discussing when and how to use and document scholarly sources in a formal presentation.
- In Measure 1.2, faculty hardened deadlines to encourage revision of the thesis and to provide opportunities for practice of the presentation. Seniors were

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encouraged to present their thesis work in progress at both undergraduate and professional conferences.

- In Measure 2.1, students were not enrolled in SCRT 181W until they earned credit for ENGL 1010.
- In Measure 2.2, faculty utilized various methods to encourage thesis students to adhere to deadlines (e.g., grade reduction).
- In Measure 3.1, the assessment counted for a grade resulting in nearly 100% participation.
- In Measure 4.1, course materials were consolidated to group similarly worked problems together, thus reducing the volume of supplemental materials offered and making it easier for students to find the topics they need.
- In Measure 4.2, to ensure that students are prepared to complete SMAT 2000, we required 3 hours of MATH or SMAT with a grade of B or better, or an ACT Math subscore of 27 or higher.
- In Measure 5.1, faculty gave guidance on the meaning and importance of each element of the rubric.
- In Measure 5.2, additional emphasis will be placed on identifying and including an assessment of the limitations and implications for the student's research writing.
- In Measure 6.1, a new assignment was added to SLSC/SBUS 4000 in which students documented their search strategies and their choices related to the rubric items. In addition, students were required to meet with their first readers to discuss the appropriateness of their sources and how to best use them to support their arguments, including blending ideas from more than one source.
- In Measure 6.2, faculty reflected on how their teaching practices can benefit the information literacy of their students.

Plan of action moving forward:

SLO 1. In SCRT 181W and 2000 co-classes, finding and documenting scholarly sources will be emphasized.

SLO 2. A stronger emphasis will be placed on encouraging students - especially seniors working on their theses - to present their research at public venues.

SLO 3. A new method for delivering the assessment quiz will be tested in SCTT 1820.

SLO 4. Additional solved problems will be added to the course materials from previous exams and solutions to further organize supplemental materials and examples for use in SSTA 3810, SMAT 2000 and 2010.

SLO 5. For the interdisciplinary courses, additional emphasis will be placed on understanding limitations and implications for the student's research writing.

SLO 6. Faculty will implement strategies for developing the informational literacy of their students, especially with respect to determining what information is needed (for a research paper, etc.) and where to find that information.