

AC 2025-2026 Assessment

Program: Master of Arts in English (529)

College: Arts and Sciences

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

Graduate School Mission: Northwestern State University's Graduate School maintains as its mission and purpose to develop, provide, and support innovative, responsive, and accessible graduate programs of the highest quality. The Graduate School encourages mastery of disciplinary literature, innovative research, and professional development and practice opportunities. It further supports research by members of its scholarly community. The Graduate School is a source of intellectual capital for the University and contributes to the public welfare of the region, state, and nation.

Department of English, Languages, And Cultural Studies Mission: The Department of English, Languages and Cultural Studies is a dynamic, student-oriented program preparing students to achieve in diverse fields. The Department cultivates innovative, responsive, and accessible education of the highest level. We provide versatility through a range of digital literacies; our students build creative, cultural, critical, linguistic, and compositional skills, all in a contemporary digital context. Dedicated to preparing students to thrive in an ever-changing cultural and workplace environment, we support research, innovation, experiential learning, and creative endeavors by students and faculty.

English Master's Degree Program Mission: The Graduate Program of the Department of English, Languages and Cultural Studies is a dynamic, student-oriented program focused on rigorously preparing students to achieve in diverse fields. The English M.A. degree focuses on developing, providing, and supporting forward thinking, responsive, and accessible graduate education of the highest level. Through concentrations in Folklife and Southern Culture; Literature; TESOL; Composition and Rhetoric; and Creative Writing, as well as a Generalist option, the Graduate Program encourages a mastery of discipline-specific literature, thoughtful research, professional development, and cross-curricular innovation as members of an engaged scholarly community. Offering its students access to creative, critical, and compositional skills and experiences, the Graduate Program provides invaluable versatility in a rapidly changing world.

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Methodology:

1. Assessment tools are completed by Graduate Faculty in English and returned to the Coordinator of Graduate Studies in English the week completion projects are due to the Graduate School Thesis each term (Summer, Fall, and Spring for each reporting cycle).
2. The Coordinator of Graduate Studies in English assembles, collates, and analyzes the data.
3. Results from the assessments are discussed with Graduate Faculty in English.
4. The Coordinator of Graduate Studies in English, in consultation with the Department Head and Graduate Faculty, proposes an action plan (if there are needed changes to measurable outcomes, assessment tools, and/or curricula or program) in response to assessment findings.
5. The program implements the action plan in the next assessment reporting cycle.

Student Learning Outcomes.

SLO 1. Ideas: Students will employ creative thinking, innovation, and creative inquiry.

Measure 1.1 (Direct—Student Artifact).

Each of the six concentrations in the M.A. program in English requires a completion project. All students pursuing the standard singular degree of M.A. in English complete a Master's Capstone. All students pursuing the M.A. program in English as part of the Louisiana Scholars' College accelerated degree programs for an Accelerated Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts (820B and 820H) and a Master of Arts in English (529) complete a thesis, which fulfills both the M.A. in English completion requirement and the Louisiana Scholars' College requirement that students complete a thesis.

Master's Capstone: The Master's Capstone falls under the Graduate School's definition of the papers-in-lieu of thesis option. Students enroll in 3 hours of ENGL 6950: Master's Capstone. A fully approved Master's Capstone proposal must be on file in the Department prior to registration for capstone hours. The capstone consists of one research paper of journal-article length or the equivalent. It must be approved by the student's director and second reader and submitted to the Dean of the Graduate School. Capstone students complete 27 hours of course work (9 classes) and 3 hours of Masters Capstone, ENGL 6950, in which the capstone or papers-in-lieu of thesis is written and submitted.

Thesis: Students in a Louisiana Scholars' College accelerated degree program enroll in 6 hours of ENGL 5980: Thesis for Accelerated BA-MA. A fully approved thesis proposal must be on file in the Department and the Graduate School prior to registration for thesis hours. Thesis students must successfully defend a two- to three-chapter thesis prior to

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graduation. Thesis students complete 24 hours of course work (8 classes) and 6 hours of thesis, ENGL 5980, in which the thesis is written and defended.

The attached rubric describes in detail the measurable outcomes for the degree completion project in both tracks and the assessment columns for each outcome.

All students will achieve an average of 8.9 or higher on the revised rubric for “Ideas”: student “employ[s] creative thinking, innovation, and critical inquiry.”

Findings: Target was met.

Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, the target of 8.8 was met. In the research-based writing for completion projects, students demonstrated high proficiency in creative and critical thinking by employing innovative approaches to content and making apt contributions to disciplinary conversations through their argumentation. Practice writing abstracts in ENGL 5800 led students to articulate and realize their projects’ innovation in their respective concentrations and completion projects.

As a result of the analysis of AC 2024-2025, in AC 2025-2026, the target was met. Students achieved increased innovation and originality in the development of their capstone/thesis projects. Evaluation demonstrated compelling and sophisticated in the students’ critical and creative approaches. The increased accomplishment in SLO1 was facilitated by two professional development sessions: one centered on the development of students’ graduate-level writing and another promoting and extending innovative methods and theoretical approaches introduced in ENGL 5800. The thirteen students who completed a research-based completion project in AC 2025-2026 scored an arithmetic mean of 9.0.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2025-2026 results, in AC 2026-2027 the Graduate Program in English will drive continuous improvement through implementation of a new requirement in the capstone/thesis project: students will present their research publicly, with an emphasis on an audience of graduate-level peers and faculty. The presentation will facilitate students’ articulation of their projects’ originality. Furthermore, audience members who are MA in English students moving toward their capstone/thesis projects will benefit from concrete and practical examples of how to achieve success in SLO 1 in their own future capstones/theses.

Dr. Khirsten Doolan also will record a guest lecture on effective composition of abstracts for ENGL 5800. This lecture will serve students’ continued improvement in conceptualizing and foregrounding the originality of their research-based and creative work from the earliest stages of their capstone/thesis projects, when they compose an abstract in proposal of the project. Dr. Doolan also will offer a workshop on locating CFPs and preparing abstracts; this workshop will supplement the guest lecture and will be available to all students in the MA in English program. The session will support continuity between the content of ENGL 5800’s learning outcomes regarding creative critical

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thinking and the conventions and values of professional operation within English studies as a diverse set of disciplines.

On the rubric, the AC 2026-2027 target for this measure will be set at 9.1 to promote continuous improvement.

SLO 2. Context: Students will demonstrate a command of pertinent critical assumptions, methodologies, and practices in their chosen concentration.

Measure 2.1 (Direct—Student Artifact)

Each of the six concentrations in the M.A. program in English requires a completion project. All students pursuing the standard singular degree of M.A. in English complete a Master's Capstone. All students pursuing the M.A. program in English as part of the Louisiana Scholars' College accelerated degree programs for an Accelerated Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts (820B and 820H) and a Master of Arts in English (529) complete a thesis, which fulfills both the M.A. in English completion requirement and the Louisiana Scholars' College requirement that students complete a thesis.

Master's Capstone: The Master's Capstone falls under the Graduate School's definition of the papers-in-lieu of thesis option. Students enroll in 3 hours of ENGL 6950: Master's Capstone. A fully approved Master's Capstone proposal must be on file in the Department prior to registration for capstone hours. The capstone consists of one research paper of journal-article length or the equivalent. It must be approved by the student's director and second reader and submitted to the Dean of the Graduate School. Capstone students complete 27 hours of course work (9 classes) and 3 hours of Masters Capstone, ENGL 6950, in which the capstone or papers-in-lieu of thesis is written and submitted.

Thesis: Students in a Louisiana Scholars' College accelerated degree program enroll in 6 hours of ENGL 5980: Thesis for Accelerated BA-MA. A fully approved thesis proposal must be on file in the Department and the Graduate School prior to registration for thesis hours. Thesis students must successfully defend a two- to three-chapter thesis prior to graduation. Thesis students complete 24 hours of course work (8 classes) and 6 hours of thesis, ENGL 5980, in which the thesis is written and defended.

The attached rubric describes in detail the measurable outcomes for the degree completion project in both tracks and the assessment columns for each outcome.

All students will achieve an average of 8.75 or higher on the revised rubric for "Context": student "demonstrate[s] a command of pertinent critical assumptions, methodologies, and practices."

Findings: Target was not met.

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Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, the target was met. The sixteen students who completed a research-based completion project scored an arithmetic mean of 8.6. Because of the establishment of two completion project tracks and the specification that the Master's Capstone or thesis must build on content from a graduate English course, students in their completion projects not only applied but inhabited critical rationales that seamlessly applied methods and theoretical approaches appropriate for publication. Reimplementation of the theory project in ENGL 5800 further contributed to students' application of current and pertinent theoretical approaches in their completion projects.

As a result of the analysis of AC 2024-2025, in AC 2025-2026, the target was not met. The thirteen students who completed a research-based completion project in AC 2025-2026 scored an arithmetic mean of 8.4, a significant drop in the score from the previous year. Although students articulated defined rationales for their methodologies, their theoretical frameworks lacked thorough and fully substantiated integration. The faculty benefited from two professional development sessions: one centered on the development of students' graduate-level writing and another promoting and extending innovative methods and theoretical approaches introduced in ENGL 5800. Although these trainings served the success of SLO1, they did not result in improvement for SLO2 in AC 2025-2026. Additionally, unexpected alterations to the ENGL 5800 schedule resulted in removing from the curriculum the theory project which was successfully reintroduced in AC 2024-2025.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2025-2026 results, in AC 2026-2027 the Graduate Program in English will drive continuous improvement and address the drop in SLO2 scores through revision of ENGL 5800 curricular calendar to ensure that an effective and revised iteration of the Theory Project will be reinstituted and remain unaffected by unexpected calendar alterations due to technical disruptions, extreme weather events, and the like.

Dr. Khirsten Doolan also will record a guest lecture on composition of abstracts for ENGL 5800. This lecture will serve students' continued improvement in identifying and articulating apposite critical methods in their capstone/thesis projects. Doolan's lecture will target the imperative of clearly defining a theoretical framework and methodological rationale at the outset of the capstone/thesis and similar projects. Dr. Doolan also will offer a workshop on locating CFPs and preparing abstracts; this workshop will supplement the guest lecture and will be available to all students in the MA in English program. The session will support continuity between the content of ENGL 5800's learning outcomes related to defining theoretical and methodological frameworks for research-based and creative work in English studies as a diverse set of disciplines.

Program 529 also will implement a new requirement in the capstone/thesis project: students will present their research publicly, with an emphasis on an audience of graduate-level peers and faculty. The presentation will facilitate students' clear articulation and justification of methodologies and critical frameworks. Furthermore, audience members who are MA in English students moving toward their capstone/thesis

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projects will benefit from concrete and practical examples of how to achieve success in SLO 2 in their own future capstones/theses.

On the rubric, the AC 2026-2027 target for this measure will be set at 8.5 to promote continuous improvement.

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

Measure 3.1 (direct—student artifact)

Each of the six concentrations in the M.A. program in English requires a completion project. All students pursuing the standard singular degree of M.A. in English complete a Master's Capstone. All students pursuing the M.A. program in English as part of the Louisiana Scholars' College accelerated degree programs for an Accelerated Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts (820B and 820H) and a Master of Arts in English (529) complete a thesis, which fulfills both the M.A. in English completion requirement and the Louisiana Scholars' College requirement that students complete a thesis.

Master's Capstone: The Master's Capstone falls under the Graduate School's definition of the papers-in-lieu of thesis option. Students enroll in 3 hours of ENGL 6950: Master's Capstone. A fully approved Master's Capstone proposal must be on file in the Department prior to registration for capstone hours. The capstone consists of one research paper of journal-article length or the equivalent. It must be approved by the student's director and second reader and submitted to the Dean of the Graduate School. Capstone students complete 27 hours of course work (9 classes) and 3 hours of Masters Capstone, ENGL 6950, in which the capstone or papers-in-lieu of thesis is written and submitted.

Thesis: Students in a Louisiana Scholars' College accelerated degree program enroll in 6 hours of ENGL 5980: Thesis for Accelerated BA-MA. A fully approved thesis proposal must be on file in the Department and the Graduate School prior to registration for thesis hours. Thesis students must successfully defend a two- to three-chapter thesis prior to graduation. Thesis students complete 24 hours of course work (8 classes) and 6 hours of thesis, ENGL 5980, in which the thesis is written and defended.

The attached rubric describes in detail the measurable outcomes for the degree completion project in both tracks and the assessment columns for each outcome.

All students will achieve an average of 8.5 or higher on the revised rubric for "Research/Discourses": student "conduct[s], analyze[s], synthesize[s], and contextualize[s] relevant research within their English concentration."

Findings: Target was not met.

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Analysis: In AC 2024-2025 the target was met. The sixteen students who completed a research-based completion project scored an arithmetic mean of 8.5. This followed the establishment of two completion project tracks and the specification that the Master's Capstone or thesis must build on content from a graduate English course, which enabled students to initiate their completion projects with core knowledge of existing research from the earlier course. Likewise, this revision to curriculum provided students with a stronger path for synthesizing pertinent published research such that they situated their project astutely within academic contexts.

As a result of analysis of AC 2024-2025 data, in AC 2025-2026, the target of 8.5 was not met, as the thirteen students who completed an extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 7.9. This represents a drop in the score; however, it is worth noting that this cohort of students scored higher than that of AC 2023-2024. Students located their projects within defined—but not clearly and thoroughly defined—academic contexts. Although students developed reasonable reviews of literature, standards in the discipline indicate lack of breadth and thoroughness that would enable students to fully articulate aptly their projects' contributions to the ongoing academic conversation in which they participate.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2025-2026 results, in AC 2026-2027 the Graduate Program in English will drive continuous improvement through implementation of a new requirement in the capstone/thesis project: students will present their research publicly, with an emphasis on an audience of graduate-level peers and faculty. The presentation will require students to articulate the ways in which their projects utilize and build upon existing research-based literature. Furthermore, audience members who are MA in English students moving toward their capstone/thesis projects will benefit from concrete and practical examples of how to achieve success in SLO 3 in their own future capstones/theses.

Additionally, a professional development session will be conducted to further strengthen the ways current graduate courses serve students' ability to recognize, synthesize, and apply existing research regarding their own research interests and endeavors. The session will address the time-based challenges of engaging comprehensive literature review in a 15-week graduate level course that consistently introduces complex content, as well as the challenges AI introduces to graduate-level pedagogy.

On the rubric, the AC 2026-2027 target for this measure will be set at 8.25 to promote continuous improvement.

SLO 4. Form: Students will practice sophisticated writing skills appropriate to stylistic conventions and genre expectations within their chosen MA concentration.

Measure 4.1 (direct—student artifact)

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Each of the six concentrations in the M.A. program in English requires a completion project. All students pursuing the standard singular degree of M.A. in English complete a Master's Capstone. All students pursuing the M.A. program in English as part of the Louisiana Scholars' College accelerated degree programs for an Accelerated Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts (820B and 820H) and a Master of Arts in English (529) complete a thesis, which fulfills both the M.A. in English completion requirement and the Louisiana Scholars' College requirement that students complete a thesis.

Master's Capstone: The Master's Capstone falls under the Graduate School's definition of the papers-in-lieu of thesis option. Students enroll in 3 hours of ENGL 6950: Master's Capstone. A fully approved Master's Capstone proposal must be on file in the Department prior to registration for capstone hours. The capstone consists of one research paper of journal-article length or the equivalent. It must be approved by the student's director and second reader and submitted to the Dean of the Graduate School. Capstone students complete 27 hours of course work (9 classes) and 3 hours of Masters Capstone, ENGL 6950, in which the capstone or papers-in-lieu of thesis is written and submitted.

Thesis: Students in a Louisiana Scholars' College accelerated degree program enroll in 6 hours of ENGL 5980: Thesis for Accelerated BA-MA. A fully approved thesis proposal must be on file in the Department and the Graduate School prior to registration for thesis hours. Thesis students must successfully defend a two- to three-chapter thesis prior to graduation. Thesis students complete 24 hours of course work (8 classes) and 6 hours of thesis, ENGL 5980, in which the thesis is written and defended.

The attached rubric describes in detail the measurable outcomes for the degree completion project in both tracks and the assessment columns for each outcome.

All students will achieve an average of 8.75 or higher on the revised rubric for "Form": student "practice[s] sophisticated writing skills appropriate to stylistic conventions and genre expectations."

Findings: Target was met.

Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, the target was not met. The sixteen students who completed a research-based completion project scored an arithmetic mean of 8.69. Students in their completion projects followed conventions for academic written English; however, their final revisions to completion project writing demonstrated an effective but not a refined understanding of audience and organization.

As a result of the analysis of AC 2024-2025, in AC 2025-2026, the target of 8.75 was met and exceeded, as the thirteen students who completed an extended, research-based writing project scored an arithmetic mean of 9.0. If scores for SLO 2 and SLO3 dropped, this result increased significantly. AC 2025-2026's professional development focused primarily on academic graduate-level writing, and these interventions clearly yielded benefits for SLO4, as did faculty's review and integration of materials related to revision, especially ENGL 5800's revision analysis assignment and its improved components

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regarding strategic scheduling for revision. In their capstone/thesis projects, students followed conventions for academic and creative writing with clarity, precision and coherence. Furthermore, their citation and formatting based on the appropriate selected style guide demonstrated high levels of correctness.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the AC 2025-2026 results, in AC 2026-2027 the Graduate Program in English will drive continuous improvement through implementation of a new requirement in the capstone/thesis project: students will present their research publicly, with an emphasis on an audience of graduate-level peers and faculty. The presentation will provide professional experience of their writing being met and responded to by a diverse audience of students and scholars in English studies. Because students will present only part of their capstone/thesis in this requirement (modelled after delivery of a professional discipline-specific conference paper or reading) students practice revision of their work for different contexts and will recognize the potential to and benefits of presenting the same content in different modalities and contexts. Furthermore, audience members who are MA in English students moving toward their capstone/thesis projects will benefit from concrete and practical examples of how to achieve success in SLO 4 in their own future capstones/theses.

On the rubric, the AC 2026-2026 target for this measure will be set at 9.1 to promote continuous improvement.

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

The following reflects the changes implemented to drive the continuous process of seeking improvement in AC 2025-2026. These changes were based on the knowledge gained through the analysis of AC 2024-2025 assessment results.

Measure 1.1

Based on two professional development sessions, faculty improved pedagogy regarding the implementation of creative approaches to research: identifying and making contributions to existing published research. Faculty revised assignments across the curriculum to improve students' experience of continuity between ENGL 5800 and concentration specific courses. As such, students benefited from continued practice and implementation of outcomes addressed in 529's introductory course required of all students. Students articulated the ways journal articles in their specific subdiscipline of English studies framed their interpretations as new or effectively different means of approaching research problems.

Measure 2.1

Based on two professional development sessions, faculty introduced new content regarding pertinent critical assumptions and practices. Students benefited from additional instruction in theoretical and methodological approaches within graduate-level or professional research within English studies. Students synthesized published models of

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research that articulate and apply current and apt methodological and theoretical approaches. Revision to the language of existing assignments provided explicit direction regarding the identification and implementation of apt methodological and theoretical approaches.

Measure 3.1

Based on professional development sessions, faculty implemented improvements to students' training in effective literature review. Students explicitly synthesized models of literature review in concentration-specific courses. These additional lessons strengthened continuity between the instruction of ENGL 5800, required of all students in program 529, and classes specific to their subdisciplines in English studies. Students also completed research proposals that served their ability to locate, understand and synthesize existing research in relation to their interventions in and contributions to scholarly conversations.

Measure 4.1

Based on professional development sessions, faculty strengthened training in graduate-level writing. Across the 529 curriculum, students received additional instruction in the clarity, precision, and coherence of academic writing in English studies, first, through additional exposure to models of the genres and writing and, second, through instruments of feedback that emphasize these criteria.

Plan of Action Moving Forward.

The following reflects planned actions for AC 2026-2027 based on assessment findings and faculty analysis of AC 2025-2026 results. Targets for all four SLOs in AC 2026-2027 have been set with consideration of the AC 2025-2026 averages and those of AC 2024-2025.

Measure 1.1

A new requirement will be implemented in the in the capstone/thesis project curriculum: students will present their research publicly, with an emphasis on an audience of graduate-level peers and faculty. Evaluation of the presentation will be based on a rubric that specifies expectations regarding SLO1. MA in English students attending the presentation benefit from a concrete and practical example of how to successfully identify, articulate, and implement creative approaches to research when they complete their own capstones or theses.

Dr. Doolan will create a guest lecture on abstract composition; this new instructional component will provide a new means of students to understand the need to take novel approaches and highlight these from the initiation of their work in proposal abstracts. An additional workshop on locating and responding to CFPs, also conducted by Dr. Doolan, will enable students to connect professional operation of scholarship in English studies with their work in ENGL 5800 and concentration-specific courses.

Measure 2.1

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A new requirement will be implemented in the in the capstone/thesis project curriculum: students will present their research publicly, with an emphasis on an audience of graduate-level peers and faculty. Evaluation of the presentation will be based on a rubric that specifies expectations regarding SLO2. MA in English students attending the presentation benefit from a concrete and practical example of how to successfully identify, apply, and communicate in writing apt methodologies and theoretical approaches—skills they will apply when they complete their capstones or theses.

ENGL 5800 will be revised to ensure the inclusion of the Theory Project earlier in the semester and outside changes to the schedule required by unforeseen disruptions such as severe weather.

Dr. Doolan will create a guest lecture on abstract composition; this new instructional component will provide students with a new means of recognizing the need to define apt methods and theorization in relation to their research. The lecture will emphasize the necessity of drafting and practicing these approaches within proposal abstracts. An additional workshop on locating and responding to CFPs, also conducted by Dr. Doolan, will enable students to connect professional operation of scholarship in English studies with their work in ENGL 5800 and concentration-specific courses.

Measure 3.1

A new requirement will be implemented in the in the capstone/thesis project curriculum: students will present their research publicly, with an emphasis on an audience of graduate-level peers and faculty. Evaluation of the presentation will be based on a rubric that specifies expectations regarding SLO3. MA in English students attending the presentation benefit from a concrete and practical example of how to successfully summarize existing literature related to new research, a skill they will utilize when they complete their own capstones or theses.

Informed by a professional development session, faculty will continue to revise lessons and assignments, including assessment instruments, to increase attention to effective literature review as a necessary context for professional scholarship and professional creative work in a scholarly context.

Measure 4.1

A new requirement will be implemented in the in the capstone/thesis project curriculum: students will present their research publicly, with an emphasis on an audience of graduate-level peers and faculty. Evaluation of the presentation will be based on a rubric that specifies expectations regarding SLO4. MA in English students attending the presentation benefit from a concrete and practical example of how to communicate their research in a professional piece of writing that is concise, correct, and coherent. These students will adapt models presented by others' capstones and theses when they complete their own.