

# National Louis University Policy on Online Education Quality

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## 1.0 PURPOSE

**1.1** National Louis University's Online Course Development Policy is part of a comprehensive academic system dedicated to supporting and sustaining excellence and continuous improvement of NLU's offerings in online and blended courses. This policy directly supports NLU's mission as "an inclusive, innovative community providing educational opportunities that inspire and empower all learners as they prepare for and advance in meaningful lives and productive careers" (<https://nl.edu/about/mission-and-values/>).

**1.2** This policy structures and guides NLU's institutional efforts in online course development, redevelopment, course assessment, and course certification, using an external continuous improvement program to set quality standards.. Through this policy, NLU maintains a commitment to using online and blended course delivery methods that support NLU's core values of equity, excellence, access, and innovation.

## 2.0 GENERAL ASSUMPTIONS AND PRINCIPLES

**2.1** Through a faculty consensus-building process and with approval of the NLU Faculty Senate, National Louis University has selected the Quality Matters Program (<http://www.qmprogram.org/>) as its external frame of reference for assuring quality in online and blended courses. The mission of Quality Matters (QM) is to "promote and improve the quality of online education and student learning nationally and internationally through 1) development of current, research-supported, and practice-based quality standards and appropriate evaluation tools and procedures; 2) recognition of expertise in online education quality assurance and evaluation; 3) fostering a culture of continuous improvement by integrating QM Standards and processes into organizational plans to improve the quality of online education; 4) providing professional development in the use of rubrics, tools and practices to improve the quality of online education; and 5) peer review and certification of quality in online education." (<https://www.qualitymatters.org/why-quality-matters/about-qm>).

**2.2** In this policy, National Louis University affirms its belief in four core principles that structure the Quality Matters Program, as well as NLU's approach to blended and online learning. These principles are:

### 2.2.1 Continuous Improvement

- The Quality Matters process is designed to ensure that all reviewed courses will eventually meet expectations.
- The process is integral to a continuous quality improvement process.

### 2.2.2 Centered Focus on Research, Student Learning, and Quality

- Focus on research - the development of NLU's online course quality rubric is based on national standards of best practice, the research literature, and learning experience design principles.
- Focus on student learning - the rubric and process are designed to promote student learning.
- Focus on quality - the review sets a quality goal at the 85% level or better (courses do not have to be perfect but better than good enough).

#### 2.2.3 Collegial Approach

- A Quality Matters review is part of a faculty-driven, peer review process.
- The review process is intended to be diagnostic and collegial, not evaluative and judgmental.

#### 2.2.4 Collaborative, Evidence-based Review

- Reviews are based on collaboratively identified evidence found in the course rather than the personal preference of an individual reviewer.
- Reviews are flexible and not prescriptive (with many ways to meet standards). While respecting and relying upon faculty's expertise in technological and pedagogical matters, NLU commits to using this review process to sustain consistent excellence in online courses so that students experience NLU online learning in a predictable and effective framework.
- The review team consists of three QM-certified reviewers, including one subject-matter expert, one external reviewer, and one master reviewer.  
(Source: <https://www.qualitymatters.org/qm-membership/faqs/underlying-principles>)

### 3.0 ONLINE COURSE REVIEW POLICY

**3.1 NLU Online Course Review.** National Louis University hereby establishes an online and blended course development, review, and certification process for the purposes of achieving and sustaining excellence and continuous improvement in its online course offerings.

**3.1.1 Online Course Development.** NLU provides technical support, learning experience design support, faculty development, and a faculty mentor consultation program as resources for NLU faculty developing courses for online offering on the NLU Learning Management System (LMS). Through its own training program and institutional membership in the Quality Matters Program, NLU provides professional development for faculty engaged in online course development.

**3.1.2 Course Design.** Online courses at NLU are designed using subject matter experts, and a robust, standardized process that has been developed in accordance with Quality Matters principles. Course design teams include a subject matter expert, program leader, and NLU Learning Experience Designers. NLU Learning Experience Designers are trained in applying Quality Matters rubrics and provide continuous, evidence-based feedback to faculty subject matter experts throughout the course development process. As such, all courses offered online at NLU reflect research-based best practices in online course design, as outlined by the Quality Matters program.

**3.1.3 Course Review Organization.** The Learning Quality Committee serves as the coordinating body for establishing and maintaining online-accessible records of internal peer reviews and certifications of NLU courses.

**3.1.4 Quality Matters Certification of Online and Blended Courses.** NLU faculty are encouraged to engage in continuous improvement of online and blended courses and to submit courses, when appropriate, to the external Quality Matters peer-review process as an objective standard of excellence. Due to cost factors associated with course submission to the Quality Matters Program for external review, NLU reserves the right to limit the number of course submissions to Quality Matters in a given budget cycle. The Learning Quality Committee regularly meets with NLU's Quality Matters Coordinator to review periodic recommendations and reports related to the Quality Matter Program.

**3.2 Professional Development for Online Course Developers and Online Teaching Faculty.** NLU participates in the Quality Matters Program as a faculty-centered peer review process designed to review and certify the institution's online and blended courses, using the QM Rubric as the quality standard. NLU uses the QM Professional Development program to assure appropriate, externally validated training of NLU course reviewers and course developers. Upon receipt of review team approval, NLU faculty will receive recognition and credit within the Promotion and Tenure process for completing professional development workshops and courses through QM, NLU internal Professional Development, and other applicable forms of training related to academic technology.

#### **4.0 COURSE DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT**

**4.1 Technical Support.** NLU provides training and technical support for all online and blended course developers and instructors. NLU technical support takes many forms, including face-to-face training, web-conferencing sessions, one-on-one training sessions, online resources, individual problem-solving consultations, and other forms of access to professional development in academic technology.

**4.2 Learning Experience Design Support.** NLU provides design support and consultation services for course developers and instructors, including one-on-one consultation, face-to-face training, web-conferencing sessions, support of an online academic commons for online community networking, as well as email and phone support.

#### **5.0 ONLINE TEACHING SUPPORT**

**5.1 New Hire Orientation.** New faculty onboarding includes training and support in online teaching and learning, with particular emphasis on meeting the needs of NLU's student community.

**5.2. Ongoing Professional Development.** NLU delivers regular online faculty development opportunities through the Center for Teaching & Learning Excellence and Online Education. Programming includes live and recorded workshops and webinars, online courses/modules, teaching handbooks, and repositories of instructional resources.

#### **6.0 ONLINE COURSE QUALITY POLICY REVIEW**

**6.1** The Faculty Senate will be in charge of review cycles for the Online Course Quality Policy. The Faculty Senate will task the Learning Quality Committee to evaluate the Online Course Quality Policy and survey faculty perceptions of the efficacy of the online faculty development policy.

**6.2** The Faculty Senate will direct an efficacy review of the Online Course Quality Policy at the end of the first year of operation and in five-year cycles thereafter.