NATIONAL LOUIS UNIVERSITY

UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE



NATIONAL LOUIS UNIVERSITY
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PROFESSIONALS WHO ACHIEVE.
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SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM HANDBOOK

Fall 2026

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WELCOME TO NATIONAL LOUIS UNIVERSITY

National Louis University was founded on the principle that a quality education can transform lives, careers and communities.

The Undergraduate College Department of Educator Preparation at National Louis University welcomes you! The purpose of this handbook is to acquaint you with the university courses, policies, procedures, and services related to your undergraduate educator preparation program at NLU. It is our hope that you will use this handbook to help guide you in your work as you begin your professional pathway toward becoming a teacher.

The mission of the Undergraduate College is to provide a rigorous, technology-enhanced, affordable college education in a supportive environment that respects diversity, in order to help all students meet and surpass their personal, academic, and career goals. In educator preparation, we do this through engaging classes, varied field experiences, intensive coaching, and professional identity building. We are a team of committed professionals with rich experiences from the field, and we are excited to share with you our learning and passion about education. We plan to be with you every step of the way in your professional and academic journey at NLU. We are looking forward to helping you succeed and become the best teacher you can be!

If you have questions about what you read in this handbook, feel free to ask your Student Success Coach/Advisor or any one of the knowledgeable undergraduate educator preparation team members. You can also find further information at the Educator Preparation Website.



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SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

Special Education Program Description:

The Bachelor of Arts in Special Education provides undergraduate students with a strong foundation in understanding diverse learners, evidence-based instructional practices, and the legal and ethical frameworks necessary to support individuals with disabilities across the lifespan. This program leads to licensure in K–22 LBS1 (Learning Behavior Specialist I), preparing candidates to teach students with mild to moderate disabilities in a variety of educational settings.

Students who pursue this program are passionate about creating inclusive learning environments and working closely with individuals with diverse learning, behavioral, and social-emotional needs from kindergarten through transition-age young adults. Topics in this major include characteristics of disabilities, individualized education program (IEP) development, behavior intervention and support, progress monitoring and data-based decision making, collaboration with families and interdisciplinary teams, culturally and linguistically responsive practices, assistive technology, and methods for teaching literacy, math, and functional and transition skills. Emphasis is placed on inclusive practices, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and preparing educators to support students in the least restrictive environment across K–22 settings.

The Bachelor of Arts in Special Education is offered in flexible formats, including fully online and blended program options. For more information on state licensure and certification information please visit NLU's Public Disclosures page.

Program-Specific General Education Courses
EDU 200: Applied Educational Psychology, 5QH

UG Education Core Courses
EDU 210: Educational Philosophy- A Historical Account, 5QH
EDU 290: Ethics in Education, 5QH
EDU 305: Equity in Education, 5QH
EAL 400: Educational Foundations for Learning English as an Additional Language, 5QH

Special Education Major Courses
SPE 445: Foundations of Special Education: Dignity, Rights, and Advocacy, 5QH
SPE 450: Characteristics of Individuals with Disabilities, 5QH**
SPE 460: Assessment Practices in Special Education, 5QH
SPE 465: Classroom Behavioral Supports, 5QH

SPE 471: Foundational Literacy in Special Education, 5QH
SPE 472: Adolescent Literacy in Special Education, 5QH
SPE 475: Methods in Mathematics in Special Education, 5QH
SPE 481: Instructional Methods for Low-Incidence Disabilities, 5QH
SPE 482: Strategies and Technology Supports for Low-Incidence Disabilities, 5QH
SPE 485: Roles and Responsibilities in Special Education, 5QH
SPE 486: Individualized Behavioral Supports, 5QH
SPE 491: Field Practicum I, 5QH
SPE 496: Senior Seminar, 5QH
SPE 499: Special Education Student Teaching, 5QH

UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATOR PREPARATION DEPARTMENT POLICIES

LATE WORK POLICY

Each instructor has the current Undergraduate College Late Policy in their syllabus. It is the responsibility of the student to read the policy and clarify any questions with their instructor. The late policy has been written with your success in mind. You must adhere to deadlines and due dates in various circumstances as educators. Turning work in on time is a professional disposition that is expected and valued by the Undergraduate Educator Preparation Department and our partners in the field. Additionally, as future educators, we want you to recognize that all of your courses have been purposefully designed so that the content builds upon what was introduced and completed earlier, making it critical that assignments are completed in order. Please reach out to your instructor if you have questions about the Undergraduate College Late Policy.

REQUIREMENTS FOR WORKING IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Prior to entering a field placement on behalf of NLU, you will be required to pass a criminal background check. Background checks require fingerprinting and evidence of identification.

Some sites may require additional items such as TB testing or mandated reporter training. Please work with your prospective site for specific requirements.

Common Requirements could include, but are not limited to:

- Criminal Background Check
- TB Test
- Mandated Reporter Training
- Adult Physical
- Resume
- Vaccinations
- Evidence of Health Insurance
- Documentation of U.S. Citizenship or eligibility to work in the U.S.

OFFICE OF FIELD EXPERIENCE HANDBOOK

Review the handbook for the Office of Field Experience found here.

FIELD HOUR TIMESHEET ACADEMIC POLICY

For courses that require field hours to be completed, a timesheet will be required to be submitted in D2L to document completed hours. If a timesheet is not received by the final day of the course, the grade for the course will be an automatic D and the course will need to be repeated.

PRACTICUM/STUDENT TEACHING ACADEMIC POLICIES

Methods Completion Requirements:

All methods coursework must be completed prior to starting the student teaching course. Methods courses cannot be taken during or after the student teaching course. Methods courses for the SPE program include the following: SPE 471, SPE 472, SPE 475, and SPE 481.

Co-Enrollment Requirements:

The Student Teaching course is comprised of two co-requisite courses that are taken concurrently. The student teaching courses (SPE 496 and SPE 499) must be taken concurrently in the same term. Students must receive a passing grade in both courses in order to complete their student teaching requirement for graduation and licensure.

Substitute Teaching for Linked Placement:

NLU does not allow substitute teaching as the teacher of record (for example, a long-term substitute teaching position) to be used to fulfill the linked placement experience.

NOTABLE UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC POLICIES

Academic Appeals:

Please see the university policy regarding academic appeals here.

Academic Honesty:

Please see the university policy regarding academic honesty here.

Disruptive Classroom Behavior:

Please see the university policy regarding disruptive classroom behavior here.

Standards of Student Conduct:

Please see the university Standards of Student Conduct in the Student Guidebook here.

Student Rights and Responsibilities:

Please see the Student Rights and Responsibilities in the Student Guidebook here.

PROFESSIONAL DISPOSITIONS

National Louis University is committed to ensuring that our Teacher Candidates have certain intangible and important attributes. In addition to mastering the technical, organizational, and teaching skills necessary for effective teaching, TCs must also demonstrate the following dispositions:

- **Dependability:** the ability to be relied upon in the professional setting.
- **Communication:** the ability to ensure that the intended message is successfully delivered, received, and understood.
- **Resourcefulness:** the ability and creativity to cope with unexpected challenges.
- **Cooperation:** working together to achieve results.
- **Perspective Taking:** the ability to perceive situations from an alternative point of view.
- **Responsibility:** defined as doing the things you are supposed to do and accepting the results of your actions.
- **Interaction with Others:** promoting NLU in a positive manner.
- **Social Equity Mindset:** showing growth over time and experience by understanding the unfairness or injustice in the way people are treated in society.
- **Ability Mindset:** showing growth over time and experience by understanding diverse learning.

These disposition requirements are monitored and assessed throughout the Educator Preparation Program at NLU. These are assessed throughout the Practicum and Student Teaching process as well. The full rubric for assessing dispositions can be found here.

ADMISSION TO THE LICENSURE PROGRAM

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) requires that each institution of higher education (IHE) determine a set of requirements in order for a student to be admitted into the licensure (educator preparation) program at their institution. This is in addition to acceptance/admission to the university. Requirements for admission to the licensure program, along with frequently asked questions about this benchmark can be found below.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMISSION

Students must meet the below requirements for admission to the licensure program:

- Achievement of a GPA of 2.5 or better on all coursework, with a grade of C or better in all courses
- Achievement of junior standing (90 quarter hours or more)
- Creation of account in the Educator Licensure Information System (ELIS)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I was already admitted to my program when I applied to NLU; does this apply to me?

Being admitted to NLU in your respective program is different from being admitted to the licensure program. Admission to the licensure program requires the completion of specific requirements within your NLU program.

Since I'm admitted to the licensure program, does this mean I will get my license now?

No; admission to the licensure program is one step in the process to earning the teaching license. In order to earn the license, you need to also pass all required test(s), complete all courses in your program, and complete student teaching.

Now that I'm admitted to the licensure program, should I go into my ELIS account and apply for the license?

No; since you are in an Educator Preparation Program through a university, you should not apply for your license directly with the state. One advantage of completing a program at a university is that the university will entitle you for the license once you are eligible for it. Therefore, you won't need to apply for it yourself and wait for the state to review and approve it.

Please note that you will see an additional credential added to your ELIS account for your Professional Educator License. The status of the license will remain in "Pre-Completion" status until you complete the licensure program.

UNDERGRADUATE LICENSURE PROGRAM BENCHMARKS

Four specific benchmarks have been identified for data collection and assessment to determine eligibility of students to proceed through the program. It is the student's responsibility to manage their individual progress through these benchmarks. All requirements in one benchmark must be completed before the student is eligible to move on to the next, and completion of each benchmark is monitored by each student's Student Success Coach/Advisor and the Undergraduate Licensure Officer. The Undergraduate College retains the right to impose new requirements, assessments, or deadlines at any time to meet Illinois State Board of Education licensure requirements.

Bench mark	Requirements	Assessments Completed After Each Benchmark
1	**Admission to National Louis University** • University application • Submit transcripts	***Note:*** *Students are not considered a "teacher candidate" until they are accepted to the licensure program (Benchmark #2)*
2	**Admission to the Licensure Program** • Achievement of a GPA of 2.5 or better on all previous coursework, with a grade of C or better in all courses • Achievement of junior standing (90QH or more) • Creation of account in the Educator Licensure Information System (ELIS)	• Literacy Intervention Plan • Inclusive Mathematics Lesson Design • Behavior Support Recommendation Report • ILTS Content Test #290 (220 or higher)
3	**Eligibility for Student Teaching** • Score of 220 or higher on the content test • Grade of C or better in all coursework	• Disposition Assessment • Field Assessment • ILTS Content Test #290 (240 or higher)
4	**Completion of the Licensure Program** • Passing Student Teaching with a grade of B or better in each course • 3.0 overall GPA • Passing score of 240 or higher on the content test o *Note: Students may graduate from the program without a passing score on the content test, but will not earn the license until the content test is passed*	• Transcript review • NLU licensure application

CONTENT TEST REQUIREMENTS

The content tests are designed to measure teacher candidates' knowledge of content related to their specific teaching field; the tests assess teacher candidates' knowledge of history, theory, and pedagogy within the different subject areas that candidates will be expected to teach such as math and literacy. The teacher candidate must pass the content test(s) in order to obtain the Professional Educator License in Illinois. Teacher candidates take all tests through the Illinois Licensure Testing System (ILTS). Please also see the Content Test FAQ and Handbook.

SPECIAL EDUCATION MAJOR

Required Test: **Learning Behavioral Specialist I (#290):**

- Required for all students seeking the Learning Behavioral Specialist I Endorsement
- Test Information and Registration: click here

CONTENT TEST POLICY

Content Testing Deadlines:

Starting Practicum	**Test-By Date (*to receive scores before your Deadline*)**	**Content Test Deadline *(Score a 220 or higher by…)***
Fall 2026	July 26, 2026	August 7, 2026
Winter 2027	November 1, 2026	November 15, 2026
Fall 2027	July 25, 2027	August 1, 2027
Winter 2028	*Pending the extension of the ILTS Score Report Schedule.*	November 15, 2027

Requirements to Begin the Linked Placement (Practicum and Student Teaching) in 2026-2027:

Students must have **one** of the following options completed in order to start the practicum course (as part of the linked placement):

- **OPTION 1:** Students must have a **passing score (240 or higher)** on or before the deadline

  OR
- **OPTION 2:** The following must be met in order to move into practicum without the content test passed:
  - A score of **220 or higher** on the content test on or before the deadline
  - Be ***registered*** for the **Discover Course**
  - Successful completion of field experiences with no unresolved student success plans
  - All checks in SONIA completed by the due dates
  - ***Sign an acknowledgement form*** indicating your understanding of what it means to progress into the linked placement without the content test passed

Requirements to Begin the Linked Placement (Practicum and Student Teaching) after Spring 2027:

The following criteria must be met to start the linked placement (practicum and student teaching) in the Traditional B.A. Programs (Early Childhood, Elementary, Early Childhood & Elementary, Secondary, and Special Education).

Students must have **one** of the following options completed in order to start the practicum course (as part of the linked placement):

- **OPTION 1:** Students must have a **passing score (240 or higher)** on or before the deadline

  OR
- **OPTION 2:**
  - A score of **220 or higher** on the content test; verification of the score is required***
  - A GPA of 3.0 or higher
  - Successful completion of field experiences with no unresolved student success plans or continued dispositional concerns
  - All checks in SONIA completed by the due dates

*** Passing the content test with a final score of at least 240 is *not* required for degree completion but **is required for licensure** for the programs listed above.

CONTENT TEST SUPPORTS

The Educator Preparation Department provides students with multiple opportunities for exposure to and preparation for their respective content test(s). Students have found distributed practice to be the most effective form of test prep. Content test practice questions and resources are available to students within their courses.

In addition, NLU has two full-time Educator Preparation Academic Support Specialists who work with undergraduate students in the Ed Prep programs to prepare for content testing. Oana Manta and Cara Ruzila help students prepare for the LBSI content test. Supports are provided in multiple formats: large group, small group, one-on-one, and self-paced work. Please also see UG Ed Prep's Content Test FAQ.

One-on-one support is limited to students who have thoroughly engaged with NLU provided test preparation supports and have had at least one attempt on the Content Test with an overall score below 220. Students who qualify should email undergraduatecontenttest@nl.edu.

COMPLETION OF SPE PROGRAM WHILE LIVING OUT-OF-STATE

Students living in a state outside of Illinois who wish to obtain a teaching license through the SPE program, should be aware of the following:

- Student teaching can be completed outside of Illinois but must be done in the grade range/setting that aligns with the Illinois endorsement (SPE: Kindergarten - age 22)
- The out-of-state mentor teacher must hold a valid license to teach in that grade range/setting (this license does not need to be Illinois and will most likely be the equivalent license to teach in that state)
- All Illinois tests and assessments must still be completed
- The license earned will still be the Illinois Professional Educator License. Once the student earns the Illinois license, they will need to go through the process to transfer their Illinois license into their home state. This varies by state and students should review their State Board of Education's website for further information.
- For questions regarding transferring a license to another state, students may reach out to the Undergraduate Licensure Officer at ugcertification@nl.edu.

ISSUANCE OF THE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR LICENSE

Licenses obtained directly through an Educator Preparation Program are issued by a process known as entitlement. This means that NLU will move the Professional Educator License status from Pre-Completion to Completed Program in the student's ELIS account once all requirements for licensure have been completed. Students SHOULD NOT apply directly with the state for the license. This will prevent NLU from being able to entitle the license and will delay the issuance of the license.

During the last quarter of the student's program, instructions will be sent for applying for entitlement through NLU. Information regarding this can be found here and specific instructions and the application can be found here. Please note that this application should not be completed until the last term of the student's program.

Students often wonder how long it will take to be entitled for the license once the last quarter of the program is complete. Unfortunately, this can take some time as there are many factors that determine eligibility for the license. Some of these factors are as follows:

- NLU's licensure application must be submitted;
- Final grades must be posted;
- The bachelor's degree must be conferred;
- All tests/assessments must be passed and posted to the ELIS account including content test(s).

Once all requirements are met for licensure, NLU will be able to entitle the student for the license in their ELIS account. The student will then be sent additional information for applying for the license, paying appropriate fees, and registering the license in Illinois. Once these steps are completed, the license status in ELIS should change immediately to "Issued".

STUDENT ACCOMMODATIONS

All students who have been approved to receive academic access accommodative services are entitled to those services as a means of ensuring an equal opportunity to complete all of the requirements of their respective majors. Please note that accommodations that fundamentally alter the stated objectives and/or learning outcomes of a particular course or program may be denied on that basis. As such, some accommodations that are deemed reasonable within the traditional classroom environment may not be deemed reasonable in a field experience setting. Students who have questions or concerns regarding the provision of ADA accommodations in the field experience setting are welcome to contact the Center for Student Accessibility Resources at CSAR@nl.edu.



STUDENT SUCCESS PLAN

On occasion, students require additional support because of challenges they have within their classes or their field placement. The Educator Preparation Department is committed to helping students through the creation of a Student Success Plan (SSP). Department leadership gathers input from applicable program faculty (including teacher development coach, department chair/director, and/or course manager) and field representatives (may include mentor teacher and/or principal) to develop the SSP. This process is designed to openly discuss any concern[s], provide assistance, and facilitate a decision regarding the concern[s]. Written documentation is created to reflect the results at each stage of the plan.

Please Note, the SSP includes a few stipulations for special circumstances:

- If a principal/administrator requests that a teacher candidate be removed from a linked placement site, the Director of the Educator Preparation Department, and appropriate program faculty will be contacted and the process will move immediately to Step 3.
- If a teacher candidate is removed from two field placements, at the request of a site administrator, the Director of the Educator Preparation Department, and appropriate program faculty will be contacted and the process will move immediately to Step 4.
- If a student is removed from a placement in the middle of a term, they are immediately placed on a SSP and may not be reinstated in a field placement for at least one full term. The student is asked to take their time out of the field to engage with the SSP and participate in reflection sessions with a Teacher Development Coach (focused on the development of their Professional Dispositions).

Step 1 – Verbal, Summarized Plan

This step is designed to provide an opportunity for the student and faculty member to engage in productive conversation about an issue that may have arisen in the university or field setting. This step is reserved for minor issues that can be discussed productively, with action steps easily identified and acted upon. Typical causes for this first step would be disagreements between students in the university setting, continued documented examples of plagiarism, or continued late submissions. Faculty provide guidance at this step for the student and help the student outline several action steps that they can complete to rectify the situation. The faculty member summarizes the notes, action steps, and required follow up via email. This step is documented in EAB by the faculty as well.

Step 2 – Formal, Written Plan

This step is designed for those issues that were not able to be rectified during Step 1 OR for difficulties that faculty feel cannot be resolved at Step 1 through open and professional communication. The student, faculty member, and department chair/director will develop a written SSP to clarify the nature of the concern[s], the agreed upon action steps and outcome[s], and the timeline for implementation. A copy of the written SSP will be shared with the student, faculty member, coach/advisor, department chair, field experience leadership (if applicable), and the director of educator preparation. This step is documented in EAB by the faculty or staff person as well. The plan is uploaded into EAB.

Step 3 – Formal, Written Plan with Consequences

If the matter as defined in Step 2 remains unresolved, intensifies, or is not able to be resolved with intervention from the university as defined in Step 2, the student, department chair and/or faculty member, field experiences leadership and/or teacher development coach (if applicable), director of educator preparation, student success coach/advisor and Student Affairs will meet to review the case. In other cases, especially those related to the development (or lack of development) of the Professional Dispositions required for teaching, students may be placed on a Step 3 Plan. Depending on the nature of the concern and the progress toward meeting desired outcomes in the SSP, the following consequences are possible:

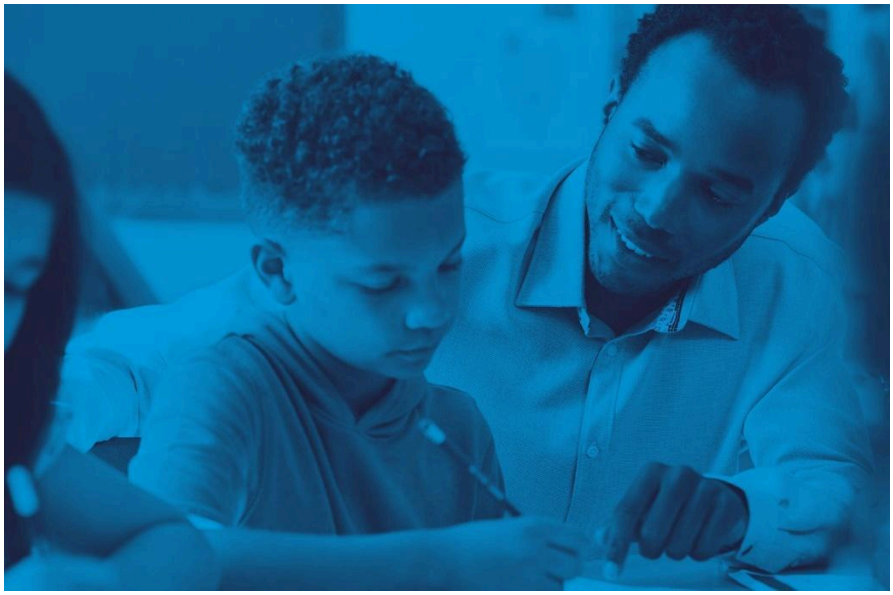
- Removal of student from course and/or field experience, with the option to repeat the course and/or field experience the next time it is available or the student and team feels the student can be successful.
- A new SSP is created that outlines revised or new action steps for the student. This SSP will be considered the final plan before the student successfully completes the action steps OR is removed from the course/program/field experience.
- Removal of student from course, field experience, and/or program *without* the option to repeat. This option is reserved for only the most serious of concerns (i.e. potential and/or documented harm to children; hostile altercation between the student and instructor, another student, teacher development coach and/or mentor teacher).
- Progression to Step 4 is deemed necessary as a consequence of a Step 3 SSP when a student has been asked to leave a placement and/or if the student has not developed the Professional Dispositions required for teaching. NOTE: It is expected that Teacher Candidates develop Professional Dispositions over time and that program faculty, staff, and university leaders see progression of the development of these Dispositions, especially prior to student teaching.

Step 4 – Written Notice, Removal from Program

When the decision is made to remove a student from the program, the student is required to cease attending courses and/or the field placement. At this step, the Director and Associate Dean inform the student of the decision both in a meeting and in writing. The student's student success coach/advisor will determine follow up steps with the student, as deemed necessary. The student can appeal the Step 4 decision in accordance with the Undergraduate College Academic Appeal Policy.

Special Circumstances

- A maximum of two classroom placements may be made for teacher candidates while under an SSP. If a teacher candidate is asked by a field site to leave a field placement twice (in either the same field experience OR in two separate field experiences) the student will automatically progress to Step 4. In some cases, the team may recommend progression to Step 4 after one removal, depending upon the nature of the circumstances surrounding removal from a field site.
- Physical violence, harm to children, drug or alcohol use and/or any other circumstances under which a teacher candidate puts themselves or others in harm's way will warrant immediate progression to Step 4.
- Failure to demonstrate the Professional Dispositions needed for teaching prior to student teaching and/or a progression toward demonstrating the Professional Dispositions prior to student teaching may result in progression to Step 4.
- Appeals must be made within 15 days of removal from the program, after which time it is up to the discretion of the Associate Dean to determine if an appeal can be made.



UNIVERSITY POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND RESOURCES

The following undergraduate and university information can be found at the listed sites:

ADA Accommodations

Advising Resources

Bookstore

Career Bridge

Commencement

D2L Support

Degrees/Diplomas

Learning Support

Office of Registrar

Online Course Schedule

Online Registration Form

Remote Learning Resources

Student Finance

Undergraduate Academic Catalog

University Library