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 of providing “access to quality higher education that nurtures opportunity for students through innovative teaching, scholarship, community engagement, and service excellence.” (http://nl.edu/aboutnlu/mission_purposes.cfm).

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. It is NLU’s policy to fulfill students’ academic and professional needs with consistently high-quality degree, program and course offerings across an array of program delivery modes, including online and blended learning opportunities that integrate effective technology and pedagogy appropriate to the learner. These delivery modes require faculty to apply the most effective methods of integrating the use of technology with their pedagogical approaches and content knowledge. Through this policy, NLU maintains a commitment to using online and blended course delivery methods within an academic system that assures consistent course alignment with NLU’s core values of 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. Quality Matters (QM) defines itself as a “faculty-centered, peer review process that is designed to certify the quality of online and blended courses” (http://www.qmprogram.org/).

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 in national standards of best practice, the research literature, and instructional 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

• The review is based on collaboratively identified evidence found in the course rather than the personal preference of an individual reviewer.
• The review is 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 NLU-certified online instructors as reviewers along with the course faculty developer.

(Source: http://www.qmprogram.org/research-grants/fipse/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, instructional 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 Initial Course Review. As a criterion for hosting an online or blended course on the NLU Learning Management System (LMS), NLU requires an initial internal course peer review by a team of three reviewers prior to the first offering of the course on the NLU LMS. In keeping with Quality Matters principles, course reviews are intended to be diagnostic and collegial, based upon collaboratively identified evidence found within the course. Faculty must submit a fully developed, deliverable online course that receives review team approval prior to the faculty receiving credit or compensation for the course. The benchmark for completion of Initial Course Reviews is 30 calendar days.

3.1.3 NLU Internal Certification of Online and Blended Courses. Upon implementation of this policy, courses will be submitted internally to review teams of three NLU Level-3 Online-Teaching Mentor(s) by sponsoring faculty member(s) for peer review and NLU internal full certification of the course. Online or blended courses offered on the NLU LMS platform must undergo regular internal peer review and internal re-certification at five-year intervals.

3.1.4 Course Review Organization. The Senate Academic Technology Committee serves as the coordinating body for establishing and maintaining online-accessible records of internal peer reviews and certifications of NLU courses. NLU will use the Quality Matters course review structure to conduct internal reviews.

3.1.5 Quality Matters Certification of Online and Blended Courses. NLU faculty are encouraged to engage in continuous improvement of online and blended courses and, after internal consultation with SATC, 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.

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, course developers, and online faculty. 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.
3.3 Alignment with NLU Online Faculty Development Program. Under a separate policy, NLU has established an Online Faculty Development Program that structures a three-tiered professional development program providing a platform for faculty training and development of online teaching-and-learning competencies, online course management skills, and online course development skills. This policy aligns with the Online Faculty Development Program which organizes faculty training and certification to support online course continuous improvement.

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 Instructional Design Support. NLU provides instructional design support and consultation services for online 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.

4.3 Support by Online-Teaching Mentors. Through its Online Faculty Development Program, NLU supports the technological and pedagogical development of all faculty by sponsoring a team of mentors trained to provide appropriate individualized consultation and problem-solving related to specific faculty needs.

5.0 ONLINE COURSE QUALITY POLICY REVIEW

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

5.2 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 three-year cycles thereafter.