

# Assurance Argument

## National Louis University - Chicago, IL

Review date: 05-04-2026

# Welcome Message for Review Team

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## Introduction

On behalf of the National Louis University (NLU) community, we welcome the Higher Learning Commission Review Team and thank you for the time, expertise, and thoughtful engagement you bring to the 2026 Mid-Cycle Review process. We appreciate the opportunity to reflect on our mission, evaluate our progress, and demonstrate our continued commitment to the Higher Learning Commission's Criteria for Accreditation.

In 2026, NLU proudly celebrates 140 years of expanding access to higher education and preparing students for meaningful careers and community engagement. Founded in 1886 by educational pioneer Elizabeth Harrison, NLU began as the Chicago Kindergarten College and was among the first institutions in the United States dedicated to preparing professional educators in early childhood education. Harrison was a national leader in the kindergarten movement and believed deeply in the transformative power of education to improve the lives of children, families, and communities. Her vision of accessible, practice-focused education continues to shape the university's mission and identity today.

Over the past century and a half, NLU has evolved from its origins as a teacher preparation institution into a comprehensive university offering undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs across multiple disciplines. While the university has grown in scope and reach, it remains firmly grounded in its founding commitment to access, equity, and workforce-focused education. Today, NLU serves a diverse student population through flexible delivery models and programs designed to meet the evolving needs of learners, employers, and communities.

## Assurance Argument Process

NLU developed its 2026 HLC Mid-Cycle Review Assurance Argument through a collaborative process that engaged stakeholders across the institution. The planning for this review began in late 2023 and was led by the Office of Academic Programs and Accreditation (A&A). The process was designed with a structured approach to develop the narrative, gather evidence, and cultivate broad campus engagement.

To build momentum and awareness, A&A partnered with Marketing to create a campaign identity for the Mid-Cycle Review featuring a tree logo and a slogan: "Roots to Branches." This logo symbolizes NLU's long-standing commitment to expanding access to higher education (roots) and the continual growth of its academic programs, student services, and institutional initiatives over time (branches) that reflect the university's evolving impact.

A&A launched the Mid-Cycle Review effort at a university-wide kickoff in Fall 2024 and subsequently presented the plan and progress to multiple leadership bodies, including the Leadership Team, Academic Cabinet, Faculty Senate, Staff Council, and Adjunct Council. The A&A team also utilized the President's Directors Strategy Forum to introduce the mission-driven approach to the Assurance Argument through interactive activities and discussion.

HLC Champions were appointed for each criterion area, as recommended by leadership, and were responsible for contributing narrative and evidence through a centralized online submission process. A&A synthesized these submissions into an initial draft, followed by additional rounds of information collection to ensure completeness and accuracy across all four HLC Criteria for Accreditation.

In addition, A&A engaged students through targeted communications and outreach to increase awareness of the Mid-Cycle Review and the upcoming site visit and to encourage participation in the Student Opinion Survey.

A full draft of the Assurance Argument was shared with university leadership in December 2025 and made available to the NLU community in February 2026 for review and input prior to final submission. This comprehensive and inclusive approach aimed to engage the whole institution in the efforts to present NLU's mission in action, reflect institutional strengths, identify areas for continued improvement, and demonstrate the university's ongoing commitment to meeting HLC's Criteria for Accreditation by providing high-quality education and support for students.

We welcome the review team's feedback and look forward to the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue about NLU's continued growth and commitment to student success.

# 1 - Mission

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The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

## 1.A. Mission Alignment

The institution's educational programs, enrollment profile and scope of operations align with its publicly articulated mission.

### Argument

National Louis University (NLU) is a private, not-for-profit, Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) with a 140-year legacy of expanding access to higher education. Since its founding in 1886, NLU's mission has evolved to reflect changing educational needs, societal priorities, and the institution's growing academic portfolio. The University's earliest mission statement appeared in its 1892 catalog and over time, has been intentionally revisited and refined to align with curricular innovation, institutional growth, and an enduring commitment to access, equity, and professional preparation.

NLU's current mission reads as follows:

*"National Louis University is 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."*

Approved by the Board of Trustees in 2020, this revised mission emerged from an 18-month planning process that engaged faculty, staff, students, trustees, alumni, funders, and employer partners. It reflects both continuity and responsiveness, honoring NLU's historical purpose while addressing contemporary learner needs and workforce demands. The mission guides institutional decision-making and enables NLU to deliver high-quality postsecondary education across a range of disciplines, modalities, and student populations, reinforcing the University's values of innovation, access, excellence, and equity in support of student success.

### Strategic Planning and Institutional Alignment

Together, NLU's mission and values guide strategic planning, institutional priorities, and investments across all colleges and functions. NLU operationalizes its mission through the 2030 Strategic Plan, which is organized around five pillars and includes annual action plans to guide progress towards the 2030 goals and outcomes.

Each year, NLU's leadership team reflects on progress made towards the 2030 outcomes and those from the prior year. This reflection also provides space to identify priorities for the years ahead to stay responsive to the changing higher education landscape and

environment.

The summer of 2025 marked the midpoint of the 2030 Strategic Plan. During the annual strategic planning retreat, the leadership team conducted a deeper reflection on the last five years and discussed priorities for the next five. This review provided an opportunity to refine and update the Pillar framework (pages 16-24) and language to address the changing higher education landscape and better align institutional priorities to the 2030 outcomes, as summarized below:

**Pillar 1: Preparing Our Students for the World of Work** - Continue expanding and enhancing the university's academic portfolio.

**Pillar 2: Promoting Students' Personal Growth, Engagement, and Well-being** - Updated to include a comprehensive student experience through engaging many units at the institution, not just student support services, to impact student experience, with a continued focus on preparing students for strong career outcomes.

**Pillar 3: Building and Fostering a Culture of Inclusion and Excellence** - Updated priorities include intentionally embedding inclusive practices into institutional culture in decision-making through shared governance structures, advancing inclusive talent development and workplace belonging, and focusing on service excellence.

**Pillar 4: Advancing Academic Excellence** - Updated priorities, based on faculty and student feedback from the Noel Levitz survey, to focus on faculty success, engagement and advancement, instructional quality, curriculum development and student learning, thought leadership and impact, and optimizing academic operations and processes.

**Pillar 5: Embracing the Future** - Updated priorities that focus on sustainability and impact through enrollment growth, online expansion, fundraising efforts, talent acquisition and retention, and emerging trends in higher education in Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The 2030 Strategic Plan includes measurable outcomes and annual planning cycles that guide institutional priorities (see Core Component 4.C.).

## **Enrollment Profile**

In the academic year 2024-25, NLU enrolled 12,613 students, including 6,083 undergraduates and 6,530 graduate students, as seen in NLU's enrollment trends from AY2022-23 to AY2025-26. Nearly half (48%) of NLU students are new each year, and the majority are degree-seeking learners. Reflecting NLU's mission to expand access and equity in higher education, the student body is highly diverse: 33% identify as Hispanic, 22% as Black or African American, 28% as White, with additional representation from Asian (3%), multiracial (2%), and international students (6%) (with 6% undeclared). Over 50% of the undergraduate populations are first-generation students or are Pell-eligible. NLU's international student population has grown fivefold in enrollment since AY21-22, from 145 students to 743 in AY 24-25. (International support services can be found in 3.D.) This diversity underscores NLU's role as an access-oriented institution serving a broad cross-section of learners, many of whom are first-generation college students, working adults, and individuals from historically underrepresented backgrounds.

To meet the needs of this diverse student body, NLU delivers programs through a flexible mix of online, on-campus, and low-residency modalities across its Illinois locations in Chicago, Wheeling, and Lisle, as well as its growing Florida location in Tampa. This structure ensures that learners, whether balancing work, family, or community responsibilities, have access to high-quality education that fits their lives and goals.

The Florida campus exemplifies this strategic growth and commitment to access. In October of 2023, the campus enrolled 133 new students for the fall term, which, when combined with the population of 367, brought the total number of students served to 500. By October 2025, driven by programmatic expansion and enhanced campus operations, enrollment nearly doubled to 946 students.

NLU's academic portfolio offers more than 80 academic programs at the undergraduate, graduate, and professional levels through five colleges (the College of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences, the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, Kendall College, the National College of Education, and the Undergraduate College), and one workforce development unit (Accelerate U). Through this programming, NLU addresses learners' evolving needs and ensures that each student has a pathway that aligns with their professional and personal aspirations.

### **Mission in Practice Across the Colleges**

NLU's mission is operationalized across its colleges and academic units through programs intentionally designed to advance students' lives and careers. Each academic unit contributes to the university's commitment to workforce preparation, equity, academic excellence, and innovation, as demonstrated by the table below.

| <b>Academic Unit</b>     | <b>Unit Mission</b>                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Alignment to NLU Mission</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Accelerate U (AU)</b> | Accelerate U at National Louis University offers affordable, rapid training experiences that come with college credit, industry credentials and a pathway to a great full-time job as quickly as possible. | AU advances NLU's mission by expanding access to affordable, workforce-aligned education that prepares learners for immediate employment and long-term career mobility, particularly for adult and historically underserved students. The unit directly advances Pillar 1: Preparing Students for the World of Work and Pillar 5: Embracing the Future through innovative, industry-responsive credential pathways that promote economic mobility and access. |

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| <b>College of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences (CPBS)</b> | <p>The College of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences strives to be the premier college of choice for students seeking to have a compassionately transformative impact on the wellness of our communities.</p>                                                       | <p>CPBS aligns with NLU's mission by preparing graduates to serve diverse communities through evidence-based practice and transformative leadership in behavioral health. Its work reflects Pillar 1: Preparing Students for the World of Work, Pillar 3: Building a Culture of Inclusion and Excellence, and Pillar 4: Advancing Academic Excellence through rigorous preparation, ethical practice, and commitment to community well-being.</p>  |
| <b>Graduate School of Business and Leadership (GSBL)</b>    | <p>The Graduate School of Business and Leadership will provide aspiring leaders access to high-quality, culturally relevant business, leadership, and management education with hands-on experiences and personalized guidance to master business competencies.</p> | <p>GSBL supports NLU's mission by developing culturally responsive, ethically grounded leaders equipped with practical competencies that strengthen organizations and communities. The college advances Pillar 1: Preparing Students for the World of Work, Pillar 4: Advancing Academic Excellence, and Pillar 5: Embracing the Future through innovative program design, industry alignment, and leadership development.</p>                     |
| <b>Kendall College</b>                                      | <p>Kendall College shall provide career-focused higher education that integrates academic rigor, professional preparation, and community engagement.</p>                                                                                                            | <p>Kendall College fulfills NLU's mission by delivering experiential, career-focused education that prepares students for leadership in hospitality and culinary fields. Its strong emphasis on applied learning and industry engagement directly advances Pillar 1: Preparing Students for the World of Work and Pillar 2: Promoting Students' Personal Growth, Engagement, and Well-being through hands-on, immersive learning environments.</p> |

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| <b>National College of Education (NCE)</b> | <p>National College of Education is a professional community collaborating with teacher candidates, teachers, administrators and others advocating for all learners. For over one hundred and thirty years, NCE has had as its mission excellence in teaching, scholarship, service, and professional development. NCE continues its history of innovative leadership in education in Chicago, the nation, and in other parts of the world. Recognizing the importance of life-long learning in a diverse, rapidly changing global society, the College is committed to developing and empowering all learners, consistent with the mission of National Louis University.</p> | <p>NCE directly embodies NLU's mission by preparing educators and leaders who advocate for all learners and advance educational equity across diverse contexts. Its longstanding commitment to scholarship, service, and innovation reflects Pillar 1: Preparing Students for the World of Work, Pillar 3: Building a Culture of Inclusion and Excellence, and Pillar 4: Advancing Academic Excellence.</p>                                                           |
| <b>Undergraduate College (UGC)</b>         | <p>The Undergraduate College at National Louis University is a national leader in driving equity in bachelor's degree attainment and employment. Our graduates will possess the knowledge and skills to succeed as professionals and engaged citizens, leading to positive outcomes for themselves, their families, and communities.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>UGC advances NLU's mission by expanding equitable access to bachelor's degree attainment and career pathways, equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and civic responsibility needed to thrive. Its focus on persistence, engagement, and employment outcomes reflects Pillar 1: Preparing Students for the World of Work, Pillar 2: Promoting Students' Personal Growth and Engagement, and Pillar 3: Building a Culture of Inclusion and Excellence.</p> |

## Mission in Practice Across the Divisions

The mission is further reinforced through the university's administrative and student-support divisions, which operationalize NLU's values of transparency, inclusion, and continuous improvement to ensure student success, as demonstrated below (and discussed in greater detail in 3.D.):

- **Admissions and Enrollment** provides clear, accessible information about programs, tuition, and pathways to degree completion. Staff guides students through each stage of the admissions and enrollment process, ensuring equitable access and informed decision-making.
- **Academic Advising and Success Coaching** provides holistic, personalized support that connects all students to NLU resources, ensures access to academic and campus opportunities, helps meet graduation requirements, and empowers them on their

educational journey.

- **Career Bridge** fosters meaningful connections among students, alumni, and employers by integrating career development throughout students' educational journeys. Through employer partnerships, experiential learning, and individualized career advising, Career Bridge supports NLU's mission by preparing students for meaningful work.
- **The Center for Student Accessibility Services** helps ensure that all aspects of the student experience are accessible by providing reasonable accommodations, such as exam accommodations, audio recording in the classroom, note-taking assistance, and alternative textbook formats. These services are available across all program options.
- **Credit for Prior Learning** offers students alternative ways to earn college credit for prior personal or professional experience or through examinations. This allows students to demonstrate the breadth of knowledge they bring to the university and have it translate into official university credit, helping decrease the overall cost of their degree and potentially accelerating their graduation.
- **Human Resources (HR)** advances NLU's mission by recruiting, onboarding, and supporting a diverse, mission-driven workforce. Through equitable hiring practices, professional development opportunities, and employee engagement initiatives, HR ensures that faculty and staff are equipped to support student success and institutional effectiveness.
- **Institutional Advancement (IA)** plays a vital role in advancing NLU's mission by partnering with faculty and staff to raise the funds needed to support educational opportunities that inspire and empower all learners as they prepare for and advance in meaningful lives and productive careers.
- **The Institutional Review Board (IRB)** ensures compliance with NLU's policies and procedures for conducting ethical research involving human participants. Every research investigator involved in any aspect of human subject research at NLU must submit a protocol to the IRB that includes appropriate application forms and informed consent documents.
- **International Student & Scholar Services** provides guidance for international students during the visa interview process, pre-departure information, orientations, post-graduate employment, health insurance, and acclimating to life in the U.S.
- **Learning and Information Technology Services (LITS)** supports NLU's mission by providing reliable, innovative technology infrastructure that enables teaching, learning, advising, and institutional operations. By ensuring secure access to digital tools, data systems, and learning platforms, LITS enhances educational delivery and expands access across modalities and locations.
- **Library and Learning Support** services promote academic integrity, intellectual inquiry, and equitable access to information. Through research support, digital literacy training, and embedded instructional resources, the library and learning support advance NLU's mission to foster lifelong learning.
- The **Registrar** upholds transparency and accuracy in academic records, ensuring that program, policy, and catalog information is accessible and reliable. The office's robust curriculum and catalog processes reflect NLU's commitment to integrity and accountability.
- **Learning Design Experience and the Strategic Data Center** advance NLU's mission by using data-informed insights and evidence-based instructional design to improve student learning and institutional decision-making. Through analytics, reporting, and scalable learning design practices, these units support continuous improvement,

academic quality, and equitable student outcomes.

- **Student Affairs** fosters a vibrant, welcoming community where students belong, grow, and nurture their purpose—empowering them to rise, thrive, and build brighter futures through co-curricular learning and programming experiences that foster agency, belonging, and resilience.
- **Student Finance** supports transparency and financial literacy by guiding students through aid eligibility, scholarships, and payment options. The office's automated processes and educational workshops ensure that students understand their financial obligations and resources.
- The **Wellness Center** offers a range of services to support students' mental health and well-being. These services are designed to address the various challenges and stressors that students may face during their college years. Services are available to students in person and virtually via telehealth. Services include counseling and therapy, crisis intervention, preventive and educational programs, wellness and mindfulness programs, and consultation and referral services.

## **Budgeting and Resource Allocation**

As a major aspect of operations, NLU's budgeting processes support mission-aligned educational priorities. The annual budget cycle includes strategic alignment reviews, cross-functional team input, and prioritization of initiatives that improve learning and student outcomes. NLU's FY26 Budget Finance Review is provided as evidence.

Recent investments reflecting mission alignment include:

- **Workforce growth:** As the university has grown, so has its workforce. Between FY21 and FY25, NLU has increased its full-time employee headcount by approximately 17%, from 668 to 784. This growth reflects an intentional financial commitment to maintaining appropriate staffing levels that support the institution's mission and ensure effective instruction and student services.
- **Technology infrastructure:** Implementation of Watermark Curriculum and Simple Syllabus platforms streamline review and enhance consistency, and implementation of Eagle Retain, an internally developed, student success management system utilizing AI to bridge communication across faculty and staff (discussed further in 3D).
- **Portfolio expansion:** Program development and expansion of allied health programs include the Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences, Masters of Physician Assistant Medicine, and Maternal and Child Health; development of additional Accelerate U training certificates in technology, Cybersecurity Analyst, Technology Sales Professional, and Information Technology Support Specialist; launch of a new accelerated Learn & Earn in Three (LE3) bachelor's degree program; and ongoing improvements such as the redesign of business core courses and new graduate program development of MS in Business Data Analytics and Doctorate of Business Administration.
- **Learning environments:** NLU maintains and enhances learning environments that support student success and workforce-relevant education; recent facility investments aligned with this mission are detailed in Core Component 4.B.

Budgeting across colleges is collaborative and data-informed. Colleges use annual assessment (3.E.) and program review (3.F.) data to justify funding requests, ensure instructional quality, and support student success. The budgeting process includes formal

submissions, leadership reviews, and final approval by the Board of Trustees (see Criterion 4.B. for more details).

NLU's strategic planning, academic portfolio, and resource allocation demonstrate clear and intentional alignment with its mission, ensuring that programs, services, and enrollment remain responsive to diverse learners and evolving workforce needs.

## Sources

- 1.A. Admissions Policies
- 1.A. Budget Finance Review FY26
- 1.A. Career Bridge
- 1.A. Center for Student Accessibility Services
- 1.A. Credit for Prior Learning
- 1.A. FY26 Action Plans\_aggregated
- 1.A. HSI Eligibility Letter 2025
- 1.A. Institutional Research Board
- 1.A. International Student & Scholar Services
- 1.A. Learning and Information Technology Services
- 1.A. Learning Design and Experience
- 1.A. Learning Support
- 1.A. NLU Academic Portfolio
- 1.A. NLU at a Glance
- 1.A. NLU History Library Presentation
- 1.A. NLU Mission and Values
- 1.A. NLU Strategic Plan 2030
- 1.A. Office of Wellness Services
- 1.A. Student Affairs
- 1.A. Student Finance
- 1.A. University Library
- 3.D. Eagle Retain
- 1.A. Advising
- 1.A. Registrar Office
- 1.A. Strategic Data Center
- 1.A. Institutional Advancement Overview
- 1.A. Human Resources
- 1.A. Enrollment by Campus
- 1.A. Enrollment by Modality
- 1.A. Enrollment Trend AY 23-26
- 1.A. NLU Strategic Plan 2030 - updated Pillars (pages 16-24)

## 1.B. Mission and Public Good

The institution's operation of the academic enterprise demonstrates its commitment to serving the public good.

### Argument

NLU fulfills its mission to advance educational equity and social mobility through programs, partnerships, and services that expand access to higher education and strengthen the communities it serves. The institution is structured to serve the public good and is governed by an independent Board of Trustees that exercises fiduciary oversight with no parent or investor interests. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, NLU aligns financial stewardship to educational priorities, with a strong commitment to economic mobility for students. The university's academic and co-curricular activities prepare students to become informed, engaged, and responsible citizens, while its community partnerships and workforce initiatives address regional economic and social needs. This mission-driven commitment to public good and reciprocal community partnership is further affirmed by NLU's standing as a recipient of the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement (see 1.C. for more details), which was reaffirmed for NLU in 2026.

### Accessibility and Affordability

In alignment with the mission, NLU ensures broad access to higher education through affordable tuition, multiple delivery modalities, and off-site partnerships that meet learners where they are. Online and low-residency formats reduce geographic and scheduling barriers for diverse learners and increase flexibility for adult learners and working professionals.

Offsite partnerships with schools, hospitals, and community colleges expand access to degree programs in underserved areas, demonstrating NLU's commitment to equity and public good. Since 2020, NLU Florida has more than doubled its community partnerships, including new school districts, externships, and business partnerships. Similarly, in Chicago, partnerships with institutions such as Morton College, College of DuPage, Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital, and Universidad del Valle de Mexico expand access to degrees for working adults and first-generation students, aligning with NLU's mission to create equitable pathways to professional advancement.

One of the key pillars of the University is ensuring that all students have access to quality higher education, and one of the ways the University helps achieve this is by keeping tuition low and among the most competitive among peer institutions. With an undergraduate first-time freshman tuition and fee level of \$13,020 annually, students who receive maximum state and federal aid can attend NLU at zero out-of-pocket cost, ensuring accessibility for learners from diverse economic backgrounds. The same tuition control can be seen at the graduate level. In 2018, the University's cost/graduate credit hour in the University's largest college, the National College of Education, was \$685. Today, it is \$700/graduate credit hour, which represents a 2% change over eight years.

To further reduce financial barriers, NLU invests significantly in scholarships beyond Federal Student Financial Aid. In 2025, the university awarded \$9.5 million in institutional scholarships, helping ensure that cost is not a prohibitive factor for students from economically diverse backgrounds.

NLU's dedication to access and affordability has been recognized nationally. In 2023, Washington Monthly ranked NLU No. 30 Best National University and Best Bang for Your Buck – Midwest, underscoring the institution's commitment to providing high-quality, mission-driven education that is both accessible and economically attainable.

### **Fostering Accessibility through P.A.C.E.**

One way NLU shows its commitment to the public good is through its Path to Academics, Community and Employment (P.A.C.E.) program. The P.A.C.E. program is a three-year, post-secondary certificate program designed to support young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities as they transition into independent adulthood. The program emphasizes experiential, real-world learning, combining classroom instruction with internships and community-based activities that help students develop practical life and employment skills.

Students engage in a structured blend of academic learning and applied experiences, with opportunities to practice skills in workplace and community settings. The curriculum focuses on meaningful, everyday applications, such as employment readiness and independent living.

Although the program operates with limited financial margin, the university continues to invest in P.A.C.E. due to its strong alignment with NLU's mission and its impact on expanding access and improving outcomes for a historically underserved population.

### **Programs Aligned with Social and Workforce Needs**

To further this commitment, new academic programs are informed by labor market data and workforce projections, ensuring alignment with critical needs in fields such as healthcare, counseling, and education (examples of Physician Assistant and Educational Leadership reports can be found here). Labor market data is also incorporated into annual and comprehensive program reviews to inform program evaluation and improvement. Advisory boards, employer partnerships, and labor market analyses collectively support both new program development and ongoing refinement.

To ensure its academic offerings remain responsive to community and workforce needs, NLU engages external stakeholders through two complementary structures: program-level Advisory Boards and college-level Brain Trusts. Advisory Boards operate within academic programs and include employers, practitioners, and community leaders who provide feedback on workforce competencies, professional standards, and licensure expectations (examples can be found in 3.A.). College-Level Brain Trusts serve a broader strategic function. Launched in 2023, Brain Trusts operate at the college level to inform program portfolio strategy, employer engagement, and long-term viability. NCE launched its Brain Trust in 2023, GSBL launched its Brain Trust in 2025, and UGC will launch its Brain Trust in Spring 2026.

College-Level Brain Trusts have already made a positive impact on programming. For

example, NCE's Brain Trust has influenced the college's focus on centering mental and emotional wellness for both faculty and educator candidates during periods of sociopolitical challenge. In response to these discussions, NCE co-hosted a joint panel with UGC's Educator Preparation programs to address the impact of the current sociopolitical climate on K–12 students and teachers. Soon, NCE will co-host a conference, titled SELCON 2026: Connecting Across Communities, to further support educators.

At its first meeting, the GSBL Brain Trust affirmed the college's strategic approach to embedding applications of artificial intelligence into curricular revisions while emphasizing the urgency and specific workforce implications within healthcare. In response, GSBL advanced targeted efforts in this area, including being awarded a Scholarship of Teaching & Learning grant focusing their research on *Access by Design: Scaling Scholar-Practitioner Support through Custom GPTs in Maternal Child Health Education*. The design of this new tool will also be embedded in the BS in Health Care Leadership and the Master of Health Administration. During the second GSBL Brain Trust session, member input also helped shape new program development, including the proposed Master of Science in Marketing Communications (MSMC). Employer feedback informed key design elements such as internship experiences and capstone projects that produce portfolio-ready work for students. These examples demonstrate how Brain Trust engagement translates into responsive programming aligned with workforce and community needs.

Although established before the formal Brain Trust structure, the Kendall College Advisory Council (launched in 2019) functions similarly at the college level, serving as a strategic thought partner for program innovation and industry alignment. For example, in 2025, based on advisory feedback, Kendall introduced four new concentrations in the BA in Culinary Management to better align with evolving industry demands. Through these layered structures, NLU institutionalizes external engagement and ensures that its academic portfolio remains aligned with labor market needs and the university's mission of preparing students for the world of work.

### **Serving First-Time, First-Year Students**

The Undergraduate College's Developmental Education model is specifically tailored to support first-time, first-year students. It consists of both corequisite lab course sections and embedded academic supports, moving away from an approach focused primarily on remediation of deficits in college preparation to one in which students' capacities are built upon through structured enrichment, enhancement, and refinement across courses. These are offered for students taking GenEd writing-intensive courses and sophomores taking math. Embedded academic supports provide students with access to writing and math specialists in class. These specialists meet with students throughout the term and develop a relationship that is part tutor, part academic mentor. They provide feedback and encouragement, helping further normalize seeking and receiving support and resources where needed.

For example, the Bachelor of Social Work program collected student feedback course-based and practicum-interest surveys, focus groups, and course evaluations to further inform program improvement, ensuring that offerings remain responsive to learners' experiences and evolving workforce needs. The Undergraduate College program leadership in other programs also provide push-ins/visits to classes to give program updates, co-facilitate discussions, and elicit feedback on student experiences. These have resulted in

Career Pathways Conversations sessions, offered as implicit curriculum throughout the academic year.

## **Centers of Excellence and Community Impact**

In addition to curricular programs and workforce initiatives, NLU advances its public-good mission through research and professional development centers that extend the university's impact across local, regional, and national contexts. For example, the Center for Literacy Excellence partners with school districts across Illinois, Wisconsin, and Florida to build professional learning networks focused on systemic literacy improvement for all students through coaching, evaluation, and continuing education. The Center for Literacy Excellence also hosts a yearly conference each January at NLU and is designed to provide professional development and networking opportunities for K-8 classroom teachers, intervention teachers, instructional coaches, program specialists, and administrators.

Among NLU's centers of excellence, the McCormick Institute for Early Childhood is the evolution of NLU's commitment to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), with over 140 years of demonstrated dedication to the preparation and advancement of ECEC Educators and Leaders worldwide. The Institute envisions a world transformed for the better by the early childhood profession's impact on the lives of children and families. To date, the center has conducted 18,500+ assessments of Illinois' early childhood programs and trained countless ECEC leaders and professionals across the country.

Across these areas, NLU engages educators, leaders, and stakeholders to address pressing educational challenges, advance instructional quality, and improve outcomes for children, families, and communities.

## **Student Well-Being, Support, and Community Engagement**

NLU's commitment to the public good extends beyond academic access to ensuring that students' basic needs are met so they can persist and succeed. Through initiatives such as the Thrive Center, a resource hub for students, and the Housing and Opportunities that are Useful for Students' Excellence (HOUSE) Liaison program, the university provides direct assistance to students experiencing food or housing insecurity. The Thrive Center (discussed further in 3.D) connects students to a network of resources, including financial assistance, food access, housing support, and wellness services, reflecting a holistic approach to student well-being. Expanded partnerships, including those supporting the NLU Food Pantry, have increased the university's capacity to meet growing student needs.

Located within the Thrive Center, the NLU Food Pantry has experienced significant growth in utilization and capacity, reflecting increased student need and expanded institutional response. First-time users increased from 239 in 2022–2023 to 574 in 2023–2024 (a 140% increase), followed by an additional 76% increase after NLU's partnership with the Greater Chicago Food Depository in May 2024. Total visits rose from 1,446 to 1,691 during that same period, then surged to 7,363 between May 2024 and October 2025 (a 335% increase).

In academic year 2024–2025, the pantry distributed over 33,000 pounds of food to 913 student households through the Chicago campus and nearly 14,000 pounds to 314 student households through the Wheeling campus. These efforts demonstrate NLU's commitment to expanding access to essential resources for students and their families.

NLU also addresses housing insecurity through targeted support. The university provided emergency housing assistance to 12 students experiencing homelessness or unstable housing, achieving a 98% retention rate among those served. This work is supported by NLU's designated HOUSE Liaison, who connects students to housing assistance, financial aid, and community resources. Increased demand and occupancy within Housing & Residence Life further underscore the role of stable, affordable housing in supporting student persistence and well-being.

Other examples of community engagement include:

- **Community Engagement through Student Veterans of America:** Under the guidance of NLU's Director of Armed Service Relations, and an AmeriCorps VISTA who helps to build capacity for programs under NLU's Education to Employment Grant, NLU's Veterans' Initiative and the Student Veterans of America (SVA) chapter has led several community service events, including: a Toys for Tots drive, volunteering at a stand down for homeless veterans, and beautifying a transitional housing facility that supports up to 400 people.
- **Engaging with School Districts:** NLU benefits school districts by preparing their educators for leadership roles through our Educational Leadership programs (M.Ed., Ed.S., and Ed.D. levels). NLU also serves school districts by sponsoring events such as leadership meetings, and in return, the school district allocates time on the agenda for NLU representatives to share professional development opportunities through its leadership programs.
- **NLU Month of Service:** This university-wide initiative encourages faculty, staff, and students to participate in service projects that address community-identified needs, homelessness, food insecurity, environmental sustainability, and students' basic needs. Through partnerships with organizations such as the Greater Chicago Food Depository, Chicago Lights Urban Farm, and Feeding Tampa Bay, NLU's Month of Service connects institutional mission and values with meaningful engagement. The most recent Month of Service in May 2025 saw faculty, staff, and students log 92 hours in support of student basic needs, beautifying campus spaces, and supporting students' career development skills.
- **Community engagement through internships:** NLU integrates community engagement into its student internship programs as part of its broader commitment to fostering applied learning and community responsibility. A notable example is the First-Time Freshman Program, which requires all freshmen to complete an internship, providing hands-on experience while contributing to the community.
- **140 Acts of Service Initiative:** As part of NLU's 140-year anniversary celebration, the university is coordinating the collection of 140 Acts of Service from students, staff, and faculty. The NLU community is encouraged to submit service engagement on campus and in their communities.

## **Workforce Development and Economic Mobility**

In alignment with NLU's mission to foster innovation, expand access to career-relevant education, and advance economic mobility, the university has incubated two major workforce development initiatives since 2020. NLU's unique incubation model, housed within the Provost Office, allows emerging initiatives to be closely monitored, supported, and refined before full institutional integration.

The first initiative, Accelerate U (AU), launched in 2020, with its inaugural Medical Assistant Certificate program beginning in AY 2021-22. The goal of AU's "job-first higher education" model is to get Chicagoland learners on an immediate pathway to a good job, so they are well-positioned to earn a college degree in a way and on a timeline that makes sense for them. AU works closely with employer partners to build affordable (Pell-eligible) academic and training pathways that bridge to an in-demand job in approximately six months. These pathways lead to an industry-recognized credential, a focus on technical and "durable" career-readiness skill development, and include coaching, wraparound support, and a meaningful cohort-based experience. Through this model, participants can earn up to 30 college credits that seamlessly "stack" into a bachelor's degree. AU now offers six short-term credentials and launched an MA pilot out of NLU's Florida Campus in AY 2025.

AU's impact has attracted significant philanthropic support. In October 2024, the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation awarded funding to expand offerings, with goals to double training pathways and triple annual enrollment by 2028. A March 2025 grant from Northwestern University and the Ryan Family Foundation supports partnerships with Evanston Township High School, the Youth Job Center, community-based organizations, and employers such as Endeavor Health Evanston Hospital. Additional funding from the Vivo Foundation, Square One Foundation, Bank of America, and Schreiber Philanthropy (discussed further in 4.B.) reflects strong external confidence in AU's model and its role in connecting learners to employment and degree pathways.

In Winter 2025, NLU launched another initiative, the Learn and Earn in Three (LE3) program, as a mission-driven workforce initiative that integrates paid employment with academic progress toward a bachelor's degree. As the name suggests, LE3 is designed to enable students to complete a bachelor's degree within three years. Built for working adults, first-generation learners, and historically underrepresented students, LE3's model is designed to reduce both the financial and time barriers to degree completion. Through integrated academic coursework with workplace learning, reflective practice, and durable skills development, students advance through a curriculum that strengthens leadership, communication, problem-solving, and adaptability, competencies that directly contribute to personal economic mobility and strengthen the workforce capacity of the communities NLU serves. The program strengthens economic mobility while supporting regional workforce capacity. In 2024, LE3 received a \$500,000 grant from the Crankstart Foundation to support program development and scale.

NLU's mission is realized through a sustained commitment to accessibility, social mobility, and civic engagement. By combining affordability, high-touch student support, workforce-aligned programming, and community partnerships, the university advances both individual opportunity and collective well-being. These efforts demonstrate that NLU's academic, co-curricular, and operational decisions are guided by the public good, reinforcing its identity as a mission-driven, community-embedded nonprofit institution and providing clear evidence of mission fulfillment through action and impact.

## Sources

- 1.B. 501(c) Not-for-Profit Letter
- 1.B. Academic Alert-2025-18-Revised-B.A.-in-Culinary-Management
- 1.B. Accelerate U
- 1.B. BSEEN

- 1.B. CPS and NLU RFP Award Letter
- 1.B. Educational Leadership Labor Market Report
- 1.B. GSBL Braintrust Agenda October 2025
- 1.B. GSBL Braintrust June 2025
- 1.B. IBHE HOUSE Liasons Information
- 1.B. LE3 - Professional Seminar 100 Course Map
- 1.B. LE3 Program Overview
- 1.B. Learn and Earn in Three
- 1.B. McCormick Institute for Early Childhood at NLU
- 1.B. NLU - CPS Program Overview AA to BA
- 1.B. NLU and CPS RFP
- 1.B. NLU Centers of Excellence
- 1.B. PACE Program
- 1.B. Partnership List and Data
- 1.B. Physician Assistant Labor Market Report
- 1.B. SELCON 2026 Connecting Across Communities Conference
- 1.B. The Thrive Center Presentation at APPG
- 1.B. Thrive Collaborative Website
- 1.B. UGC Developmental Education Model
- 1.B. 1.C. 2026 NLU Carnegie Community Engagement Classified Campus Letter
- 3.D. NLU Food Pantry & THRIVE Resources
- 1.B. Center for Literacy Conference 2026
- 1.B. Center for Literacy
- 1.B. 140 Acts of Service
- 1.B. Washington Monthly
- 1.B. Tuition and Fee Slides
- 1.B. 2023 Washington Monthly College Guide

## 1.C. Mission and Diversity of Society

The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

### Argument

NLU's mission and values, especially those of equity, access, and innovation are embodied through curricular and co-curricular experiences that prepare students for civic responsibility, leadership, and workplace success in a diverse society. NLU's 2030 Strategic Plan reinforces civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world through its operationalization of NLU's mission to prepare learners for meaningful lives and productive careers.

Engaging with a diverse society has long been a cornerstone of NLU's identity, as evidenced by the description on the NLU website regarding the institution's second value, Access: "From its founding, NLU has strived to expand access to higher education, especially for those who have historically encountered barriers due to geography, marginality, or economic status. We embrace and build upon the strength that comes from a diverse student body, faculty, and staff." This spirit guides all institutional work.

The University Learning Outcomes (ULOs) explicitly include a Civic and Global Learning outcome, ULO 6, emphasizing understanding of cultural diversity, ethical reasoning, and collaboration across differences. Every program across the Institution aligns and assesses its curriculum to the ULOs, ensuring each program prepares students to engage in Civil and Global Learning and demonstrate these competencies. Learning expectations are scaffolded across degree levels:

- Associate's level: Describe one's civic and cultural background, including origins and assumptions.
- Bachelor's level: Evaluate contested public issues considering diverse perspectives and scholarly evidence
- Graduate level: Form policy positions considering both scholarship and stakeholder narratives relevant to the field.

### National Recognition of Community Engagement

In recognition of these efforts, NLU was reaffirmed for the Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement in January 2026 after first being awarded this elective classification in 2015. This national designation affirms that community engagement is comprehensive, reciprocal, and embedded across teaching, learning, research, and service. The classification recognizes institutions that demonstrate mutually beneficial partnerships with community organizations, meaningful integration of engagement into curricular and co-curricular experiences, and sustained institutional commitment supported by leadership, policies, and infrastructure.

For NLU, the Carnegie Classification serves as an external validation of how the university operationalizes its mission and values, particularly equity, access, and civic responsibility, through academic programs, faculty and staff engagement, student learning outcomes, and community partnerships. As illustrated throughout this criterion, community engagement at NLU is not a discrete activity but a core educational practice that prepares students for leadership, civic participation, and workforce success while advancing the well-being of the communities the university serves.

### **Civic Engagement Across Colleges**

NLU's curriculum integrates themes of equity, inclusion, and social responsibility across all colleges.

- The **Undergraduate College** offers several general education and major courses that incorporate civic-minded projects. In CAR 295 Final Project, students complete a design-thinking project in partnership with a local community organization, applying innovative solutions to real-world problems. In ART 105, students curate presentations examining race and identity in American art, connecting these themes to their own lived experiences. Also, in HIS 102, a required general education course on American Government, students craft policy memos on social issues of their choosing and deliver presentations applying their understanding of civic processes and public policy.
- In the **Undergraduate Honors Program**, community engagement is thoughtfully integrated into the study abroad/study away experience. While not a required component, primarily due to cost, NLU has implemented several strategies to make this experience more accessible. To promote inclusivity, NLU offers a 50% scholarship to offset participation costs, and the trip is structured as an optional course fee, enabling students to apply for MAP and Pell Grants. This approach has been critical in ensuring wider access, with 90% of participants able to use financial aid to cover trip expenses.
- The **Kendall College Culinary Program** provides several opportunities for community engagement through practical, hands-on experiences. Students are required to complete an internship in food-related businesses, such as restaurants and catering services, to apply their culinary skills in real-world settings (SCI 300 Food Science). Additionally, students operate the Kendall College Dining Room, a fine-dining, student-run restaurant open to the public. This experience offers students the chance to engage with the community while developing restaurant management skills. The program culminates in a capstone project (CAPK 498 Kendall Integrative Senior Project II) where students present their work to industry professionals.
- At the **National College of Education**, the Middle Grades Teacher Preparation Program incorporates civic engagement through an anti-racist curriculum that prepares future educators to address systemic inequalities and foster democratic participation in their classrooms. Teacher candidates implement community-based projects that engage students in social justice issues, cultivating critical thinking, advocacy, and ethical reasoning (MGE 505 Analysis of Teaching and Learning assignment).
- The **College of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences** integrates civic engagement into its curriculum through courses such as PsyD 788 Advocacy Psychology, where students develop advocacy projects addressing issues at the local and national levels. The Community Psychology PhD Program includes courses such as LAP 615 Community Organizing, which equip students with skills in coalition-building, policy advocacy, and social change efforts that directly impact local communities.

- In the **Graduate College of Business and Leadership**, programs use the Ethical Lens Inventory (ELI), a research-based tool that enables students to understand their distinct ethical lens and approach, as well as how their style and beliefs manifest when working with or leading others. The ELI is an activity built into the coursework in the Master of Business Administration, Master of Science in Human Resource Management & Development, and Master of Science in Business Data Analytics.

## Co-curricular Civic Engagement Opportunities

- The **Honors Program** facilitates cross-cultural exchange, local excursions, and international learning experiences that deepen global awareness and intercultural competency. In this program, students have had the opportunity to travel to Costa Rica to focus on environmental, social, and economic sustainability issues, and in AY25-26, students will visit Puerto Rico.
- **NLU's Braven partnership**, an approved HLC contractual arrangement, offers a career-readiness accelerator course focused on inclusive leadership, mentorship from industry professionals, and civic awareness.
- The **Center for Student Accessibility Resources** ensures equitable access to learning environments and collaborates with faculty to provide appropriate accommodations.
- Initiatives such as **Eagle Brotherhood** provide mentoring and peer support for historically underrepresented groups.
- NLU's civic mission is institutionally supported through annual events like the **Month of Service**, volunteer matching through established organizations in IL and FL, and the Office of Engaged Research, which funds community-engaged scholarship.
- **BSEEN's "My BECOMING Story" series** connects NLU scholars to community and institutional leaders who share their personal and professional growth stories. These narratives help students explore their identities and understand how they can make an impact in their communities.
- Students in the B.A. Communication and Media and the B.A. in Marketing programs operate **NLU's Eagle Talk podcasting station**, producing episodes that explore social issues, community concerns, and civic topics. Through this work, students develop media literacy, public communication skills, and the ability to engage thoughtfully in conversations about politics, government, and contemporary events.
- NLU advances its mission of preparing engaged, socially responsible citizens through institutionally supported **Get Out the Vote initiatives**, which promote civic participation among a diverse, largely first-generation and Pell-eligible student population. NLU's participation in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) provides systematic, disaggregated data on student voting behavior that the University uses to assess equity in civic participation and strengthen inclusive democratic engagement efforts across its campuses.

## Civic Engagement Opportunities for Faculty

NLU's Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE) has expanded its offerings since the last Assurance Argument and functions as the cornerstone for faculty development, offering robust support for integrating community engagement into teaching, research, and service. The CTLE offers a range of workshops and seminars to help faculty and staff enhance their skills in community-based pedagogy and research and is discussed further in 3.A., 3.B., and 3.D.

To support community-engaged scholarship, NLU introduced Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) to deepen knowledge of community-based teaching and research. These FLCs bring together faculty across disciplines to collaborate, share best practices, and refine community engagement initiatives. Since their launch, over 50 faculty members have participated in these communities, further embedding engagement in course design and research projects.

The Office of Engaged Research at NLU fosters a culture of collaborative, community-based scholarship through internal funding and faculty support. Through NLU's Internal Grant Program, including Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and Seed Grants, the office supports interdisciplinary projects that benefit both the university and the community. On average, 25 faculty members, including adjuncts, receive grants annually, resulting in expanded partnerships with local organizations and increased community-based research.

In addition to funding, the Office provides mentorship in grant writing, facilitates connections with community partners, and promotes public scholarship in collaboration with Institutional Advancement. These efforts help align faculty research with community needs and advance NLU's commitment to mutually beneficial community-university partnerships.

More recently, NLU has intentionally expanded support for faculty community engagement while increasing opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration across colleges. The expansion of faculty development programming, engaged research infrastructure, and cross-disciplinary partnerships has resulted in broader faculty participation in community-engaged teaching and scholarship, as well as stronger and more sustainable partnerships with community organizations.

Building on this foundation, NLU has continued to extend engagement-focused professional development to adjunct faculty. In January 2026, the National College of Education hosted its second Adjunct Connections Conference, and in February 2026, the Florida campus hosted its first Adjunct Connections event. These conferences extend the University-wide Fall Connections Conference model (discussed further in 3.C.) and reflect NLU's ongoing commitment to equipping adjunct faculty with institutional knowledge, community engagement opportunities, and access to professional development resources.

NLU's faculty performance evaluation system, established in Faculty Policy 103, Faculty Performance Evaluation, reinforces the institution's commitment to civic engagement, collaboration across differences, and community-responsive teaching. Discussed below in 3.C. 3.D., and 3.E., the system applies to all full-time faculty, tenure, professional practice, and teaching-track, and evaluates performance across three domains: Teaching, Service, and Thought Leadership. Each domain includes expectations that directly support advancing civic learning, community engagement, and responsible citizenship. By embedding expectations related to civic learning, community engagement, and public-facing scholarship into faculty evaluation, NLU signals that engagement with societal challenges and diverse communities is a core professional responsibility. These expectations intentionally model democratic values, ethical engagement, and respect for multiple perspectives for students.

In the Teaching domain, faculty are expected to create inclusive, student-centered learning environments and to employ diverse, innovative pedagogy. These criteria encourage experiential and community-based learning, such as service-learning projects, applied research, and collaborations with external partners, providing students with opportunities to

apply course content in real-world civic and community contexts.

The Service domain explicitly centers engagement with internal and external communities. Faculty are expected to contribute not only to the university but also to professional, civic, and educational organizations. Faculty document how their community engagement activities support NLU's mission and contribute to the broader public good, ensuring students see modeled commitments to civic responsibility and community collaboration.

The Thought Leadership domain, evaluated for tenure and professional practice faculty, emphasizes the dissemination of knowledge to local, regional, national, and global communities. This includes scholarship and professional activities that inform public practice, shape policy, and promote social impact, modeling for students how disciplinary expertise contributes to civic life.

At the program level, community engagement is also reinforced through the annual program review process, which requires programs to document faculty and student engagement with external partners. This ensures that civic learning and community engagement remain embedded in curricula, program goals, and student learning experiences.

By incorporating community engagement into faculty evaluations and program reviews, NLU reinforces the importance of reciprocal partnerships and meaningful external collaboration. These policies ensure that faculty efforts to engage with the community are valued and recognized as central to their teaching, service, and scholarship. Through these sustained, reciprocal efforts, NLU ensures students are prepared to thrive in a diverse, interconnected world while contributing meaningfully to their communities and professions.

## Sources

- 1.B. 1.C. 2026 NLU Carnegie Community Engagement Classified Campus Letter
- 1.C. ART 105 Final Project
- 1.C. Braven program
- 1.C. CAR 295 Final Project
- 1.C. Center for Student Accessibility Resources
- 1.C. Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE)
- 1.C. Eagle Talk Podcast Series
- 1.C. Faculty Learning Communities
- 1.C. Faculty Policy 103 - Performance Evaluation
- 1.C. Florida Adjunct Connections 2026
- 1.C. Get Funding
- 1.C. GSBL-Ethical Lens Inventory
- 1.C. HIS 102 Final Project
- 1.C. CAPK 498 Kendall Integrative Senior Project II
- 1.C. SCI 300 Food Science
- 1.C. LAP 615 Community Organizing
- 1.C. MGE 505 Analysis of Teaching and Learning Directions
- 1.C. NCE Adjunct Connections Agenda - Jan. 10, 2026
- 1.C. NLU ISR - Braven Contractual Arrangement (page 3)
- 1.C. PSYD 788 Advocacy Psychology Syllabus and Rubrics
- 1.C. Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
- 1.C. Seed Grants

- 1.C. UGC Honors Program Description and Events
- 1.C. ULOs with-DQP 3.0-integrated
- 1.C. Undergraduate Honors Program
- 1.C. Volunteer Opportunities
- 1.C. 2.E. 3.C. Connections 2025 Email
- 1.C. BSEEN Videos
- 1.C. Voter Registration
- 1.C. NSLVE Campus Report 2022 - 001733
- 1.C. FPE 103 Domains

## **Criterion 1 Summary**

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

### **Argument**

National Louis University (NLU) demonstrates that its mission is clearly articulated, publicly communicated, and embedded throughout institutional operations. Rooted in a long-standing commitment to expanding access to education, the mission guides strategic planning, academic programming, enrollment strategy, and resource allocation through the 2030 Strategic Plan and its focus on student success, workforce preparation, inclusive excellence, and academic quality.

NLU's academic programs and support services reflect its commitment to serving diverse and historically underserved learners through applied learning, career relevance, and wraparound student support. The university advances the public good through affordable pathways, workforce development initiatives, and community partnerships that address regional and societal needs. Civic engagement is further supported through curriculum, co-curricular experiences, and community-engaged teaching, demonstrating that NLU's mission is actively realized across institutional practice.

### **Sources**

*There are no sources.*

## 2 - Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

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In fulfilling its mission, the institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

### 2.A. Integrity

Actions taken by the institution's governing board, administration, faculty and staff demonstrate adherence to established policies and procedures.

#### Argument

National Louis University (NLU) upholds a strong institutional culture of integrity and ethical behavior through clearly articulated policies, procedures, and governance processes that guide decision-making at every level of the institution. Examples include Faculty Policies; College Constitutions (3.A.); Human Resources, Finance, Information Technology, Student and Safety Policies (Student Guidebook); the Employee Handbook; the Academic Catalog; and Board of Trustees policies and bylaws (2.C.). Together, these policies establish shared expectations for ethical conduct, academic integrity, compliance, and accountability across the university.

Integrity is further reinforced through active oversight and shared governance. Institutional policies are regularly reviewed, updated, and approved through established governance and oversight processes to ensure continued relevance in a changing educational and societal landscape. Implementation is supported by standing university and college-level committees (e.g., Academic Standards & Appeals, Promotion and Tenure, and Governance Committees) that promote transparency, consistency, and fairness in institutional practice. To safeguard impartial decision-making, members of the Board of Trustees and the President's Leadership team annually complete Conflict of Interest disclosures, affirming that decisions are made in the best interest of the university and are free of external influence.

#### Human Resources

Human Resources (HR) works with university leadership to create policies and procedures to ensure employees act with integrity and exhibit fair and ethical behavior in their roles. Faculty and staff hiring is in accordance with NLU's Recruitment and Selection Policy. Once hired, employees must complete a New Employee Orientation that covers the Code of Conduct Policy, Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality Policy, Employee Handbook, and Equal Employment Opportunity and Anti-Harassment Policy. When potential conflicts of interest or code-of-conduct violations arise, the HR team investigates and takes appropriate action. The university also has a Whistleblower Policy, an email address, and a Hotline where individuals can anonymously report any concern without fear of retribution. Additionally, all employees who voluntarily separate from the university are encouraged to complete an Exit Interview, and feedback is used to make improvements. Further hiring policies and procedures are discussed in 3.C.

HR also manages a set of required online training through Acorn, NLU's employee learning management and engagement platform, that employees must complete annually to comply with institutional, state, and federal regulations. These trainings address ethics and integrity and include Bystander Intervention Training, Sexual Harassment Prevention, and Title IX training.

## **Student Complaints & Grievances**

NLU offers students a variety of methods to report issues or complaints, including phone, email, comment cards, in-person meetings, and online forms. New student orientation, discussed further in 2.B. and 3.D., includes training on institutional policies, reporting procedures, and access to the "Let Us Know" platform for reporting concerns or complaints.

Policies and procedures have been established to foster open communication, and Student Affairs staff support students and collaborate with faculty, staff, and administration to identify options and strategies for resolution. The Assistant Dean of Students is the primary point of contact in Student Affairs for students seeking assistance in addressing their concerns. Student Affairs maintains a Complaints and Grievances website to assist students in addressing their concerns and appeals and to provide transparency around the policy and process. The website also provides contact information for filing complaints with external agencies such as the Illinois Board of Higher Education, the Florida Department of Education, and the Higher Learning Commission.

- Academic Appeals and Grievances include academic issues affecting an individual student enrolled in the University, such as the awarding of transfer credit, course grades, admission to a specific program, and certification for graduation.
- Non-academic grievances include university errors related to non-academic issues. In such instances, students can file a non-academic grievance through an Issue Resolution Form.

Alongside the Student Complaints and Grievances website, NLU maintains a centralized "Let Us Know" reporting webpage. This webpage serves as a comprehensive intake system for students, faculty, staff, and other community members to submit concerns. Reports may include formal complaints and grievances, facilities-related issues, student conduct or behavioral concerns, academic appeals (including grade challenges), or a Human Resources Incident Report form. By consolidating these reporting pathways into a single, accessible system, the university promotes transparency, timely response, and coordinated follow-up across administrative units.

In 2023, NLU launched a multi-year initiative to strengthen its student complaint and conduct processes, ensuring that reporting systems are transparent, responsive, and aligned with best practices in student rights and institutional integrity. This improvement plan was initiated to better position NLU with centralized data on complaint categories, processing times, outcomes, and time to resolution. Initial response times averaged three to seven business days because a single staff member managed all cases, which limited the institution's ability to promptly investigate concerns, identify patterns, or ensure equitable support. These findings underscored the need for a more responsive, data-informed structure capable of tracking each complaint from intake through resolution and supporting timely case progression, which was implemented as shown below:

- **Phase 1 (2023, 2024): Audit and Immediate Response Improvements.** A comprehensive audit revealed an average complaint response time of ten business days. NLU expanded the Director of Student Conduct and Community Standards role to include Compliance and Ombuds responsibilities, reducing initial response times to 24–72 hours.
- **Phase 2 (2024, 2025): Systems, Processes, and Training Enhancements.** The Director of Student Conduct and Community Standards was designated as the primary point of contact for complaints, clarifying responsibility and improving workflow. The office optimized its use of Maxient, NLU's student conduct records software, by integrating student schedules directly into appointment functions and reducing reliance on multiple systems. Work also began to connect Maxient data to the institutional Data Lake and Banner system to support dashboard development. NLU expanded education and communication by offering training to faculty and staff.
- **Phase 3 (2025, 2026, in development): Data Driven Analysis, CAS Standards, and Expanded Education.** The next phase focuses on building robust reporting and analysis capabilities, aligned with the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) standards for assessing service effectiveness and student satisfaction. Continued integration of Maxient with institutional data systems will support more accurate reporting and trend analysis. Additional training will ensure faculty, staff, and students understand complaint processes and institutional policies, supported by regular communications throughout the academic year.

NLU's commitment to integrity also extends to accessibility and equity. Title IX compliance training is conducted annually through SUNY's Student Conduct Institute and includes all relevant roles (Title IX Coordinator, investigators, and hearing board members). Additionally, NLU complies with the Higher Education Housing and Opportunities Act through annual training for designated HOUSE Liaisons, who support students experiencing housing insecurity.

## Academics

NLU operates through shared governance, adheres to external standards, and complies with regulatory requirements that ensure its academic integrity. All curricular changes or new programs are reviewed through multiple channels involving faculty, staff, and administration, including the University Curriculum Council, college curriculum committees, and College and Provost leadership. Academic strategy is presented during Academic Cabinet meetings, where curricular initiatives are discussed and operationalized with academic leadership. Other regular review cycles, such as assessment and program review, contribute to the integrity of academic offerings and operations (see 3.E. and 3.F., respectively).

The Learning Experience Design (LXD) team strengthens institutional integrity by embedding academic, regulatory, and legal standards into NLU's course design infrastructure. All standardized course templates incorporate required institutional policies and compliance elements, including academic honesty, FERPA, ADA, and Section 508 accessibility standards, into every course template.

LXD applies Quality Matters informed design standards and review practices to support consistent, accessible, and inclusive online and hybrid learning experiences. Through centralized design governance, LXD ensures consistency across instructional modalities and supports instructional continuity through remote-learning contingencies and

cybersecurity-aware practices. To date, LXD has designed over 85% of NLU courses for delivery across online, on-campus, and low-residency formats, reinforcing adherence to policy and instructional resilience across modalities. LXD is discussed further in 3.A.

External standards set by programs or specialized accreditors provide another layer of measurement for academic integrity. NLU's education programs are accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), business programs by the International Accreditation Council for Business Education (IACBE), counseling through Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), clinical psychology (Illinois and Florida) by the American Psychological Association (APA), and culinary and baking programs by American Culinary Federation (ACF), among others. More information about external regulatory requirements and specialized accreditors is provided in 3.A.

## **Finance**

The Audit Committee of the Board of Trustees, also discussed in 4.A., works directly with the institution's auditors to ensure that appropriate controls are in place to support ethical fiscal, operational, and technology practices. NLU is proud of the institution's successful audit results, which are demonstrated by the clean audit opinions received over multiple years. Significantly, NLU has received an unqualified audit opinion for the past 20 years, with no adjustments to its financial statements, and has not had any audit findings from external auditors for the past ten years. The NLU Board of Trustees meets both openly and privately with the institution's external auditors biannually to review audit results, and this open dialogue ensures that any issues are brought to the forefront.

## **Auxiliary**

NLU ensures that all auxiliary functions operate transparently, with fiscal responsibility, and with ethical integrity. Auxiliary services, such as the Daily Grind Cafes and Student Housing available at the University Center, are governed by the same institutional policies that guide academic and administrative functions. In doing so, the university ensures that every service is structured to provide clear information, consistent policies, and student support.

NLU's auxiliary services include The Daily Grind, student-supported coffee shops operated out of the lobbies of its Chicago and Wheeling campus locations. These cafés provide transparent service operations, including online ordering, mobile app access, posted hours and pricing, and a clear structure for student employment, training, and oversight. Policies governing staffing, food service standards, safety, and accessibility are publicly available, thereby aligning with institutional expectations for student support and auxiliary service integrity. By integrating student work-learning in hospitality and retail alongside service to the campus community, The Daily Grinds exemplify NLU's commitment to transparent, mission-aligned auxiliary functions that support student success and ethical operations.

NLU's commitment to transparency extends to residential services as well. The university ensures integrity in its auxiliary student housing services through its partnership with the University Center of Chicago, which provides students with safe, centrally located residential options. The Housing and Residence Life website provides comprehensive, current information on housing options, pricing, amenities, safety protocols, and occupancy procedures, enabling students to make informed decisions. Residential policies, including

community standards, guest policies, safety expectations, and emergency procedures, are publicly posted and aligned with institutional policies for student conduct, Title IX, and non-discrimination.

## Sources

- 2.A. 2.B. Institutional and Programmatic Accreditation
- 2.A. ACORN
- 2.A. Code of Conduct Policy
- 2.A. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality Policy
- 2.A. Employee Handbook
- 2.A. Equal Employment Opportunity and Anti-Harassment Policy
- 2.A. Exit Interview-Staff and Faculty
- 2.A. Incident Report Form
- 2.A. Learning Design and Experience
- 2.A. Let Us Know
- 2.A. NLU Financial Statements 2021-2025
- 2.A. NLU Recruitment and Selection Policy
- 2.A. NLU Whistleblower Policy
- 2.A. Student Complaints and Grievances
- 4.A. NLU BOT Audit Committee Charter
- 3.A. Institutional and Programmatic Accreditation
- 2.A. New Hire Orientation (sample)
- 2.A. Faculty Association Constitution - UCC page 13
- 3.C. Staff Trainings
- 2.A. Housing and Residence Life
- 2.A. University Center Resident Handbook & Policies
- 2.B. 3.D. NLU UG Orientation Booklet Winter 2026

## 2.B. Transparency

The institution presents itself accurately and completely to students and the public with respect to its educational programs and any claims it makes related to the educational experience.

### Argument

At NLU, transparency and accuracy are foundational principles guiding communication with students, prospective learners, and the public. Information regarding programs, policies, services, and achievement is clearly and consistently shared through multiple public-facing platforms, including the NLU website and academic catalog.

### Catalog and Curriculum Accuracy

The online academic catalog is updated three times per academic year (August, January, and April), with the August publication serving as the official release for the new academic year. All updates follow formal governance workflows in the university's curriculum management system, Watermark, ensuring accuracy.

The Registrar's Office manages the university's academic catalog, which serves as the official repository of:

- Academic policies
- Degree requirements for all programs
- Academic calendar
- Tuition and fees
- Financial aid information
- Admission requirements
- Course descriptions
- University directory

To further ensure accuracy and consistency of public-facing information, NLU's Annual Program Review (APR) process (see 3.F.) requires each academic program to formally review and attest to the accuracy of its program information as published in the academic catalog and on the university website. As part of this review, Program Directors confirm that program descriptions, degree requirements, learning outcomes, modality offerings, and other key disclosures accurately reflect approved curriculum and current practice. This required attestation reinforces shared responsibility for transparency, strengthens alignment between academic governance and public communication, and provides an additional quality assurance checkpoint for the information relied upon by prospective and current students.

### Curriculum Change Process

Catalog updates occur through formal curriculum workflows submitted via the university's curriculum management system. Three primary workflow types govern the curriculum and

policy changes: New or Revised Program Academic Alerts, New or Revised Course Data Collection, and Point of Interest Memorandums.

The Registrar's Office oversees three primary workflows to ensure that approved changes to curriculum and policies are accurately reflected in the catalog and shared with the university community in a timely manner. These workflows follow a defined sequence: originating with faculty, proceeding through the curriculum committee and dean review and approval, and finalized by the Provost Office and Registrar. Announcements and documentation are shared via internal channels for full transparency, including email announcements and posts on the [Program and Curriculum Development webpage](#). All prior academic alerts, course data collection forms, and points of interest memoranda are archived and available to community members, as follows:

- **Academic Alerts** for new/revised programs
- **Course Data Collection** for new course implementations and course revisions
- **Points of Interest Memoranda** for policy updates

Each catalog edition incorporates all approved curriculum and policy changes released since the previous catalog was published and is archived in PDF versions for historical records. Changes can also trigger updates to the degree audit system and Student Information System, all of which are handled by the Registrar's Office.

### **Transparency in Transfer Credit and Articulation**

Transparency extends to the evaluation and communication of transfer credit. NLU evaluates all transfer credits, including [Credit for Prior Learning](#) and foreign credentials, in accordance with university, college, and program policies. The [Transfer Credits website](#) provides detailed guidance on transfer types, policies, and procedures, while the [Transfer Articulation Guides](#) (TAG), integrated with NLU's student information system, display approved transfer pathways, articulation agreements, and course equivalencies. These tools are updated whenever program or policy changes occur, ensuring prospective and current students always have access to accurate, up-to-date information.

### **Consumer Information**

To further support transparency and ensure that students and the public receive a complete and accurate understanding of NLU's academic expectations and institutional standards, the university maintains clear and publicly accessible consumer information, in accordance with the Higher Education Act requirements on its [Consumer Information website](#). This information includes financial aid, student outcomes, campus safety, student policies, including drug and alcohol policies, cost of attendance, accreditation status, and required student disclosures.

Accreditation information is readily available on NLU's website and on specific program pages, where the public can view [current program accreditation status](#), [licensure or certification disclosures](#), and [student achievement data](#). These disclosures ensure that prospective and current students have a full and accurate understanding of program quality, professional requirements, and graduate outcomes prior to enrollment.

NLU also ensures consistent access to student policies through the annually updated [Student Guidebook](#), which serves as the authoritative source for student rights and

responsibilities. The guidebook includes:

- Standards of student conduct
- Complaint and grievance procedures
- Bias and hate-crime reporting protocols
- Title IX policies and coordinator training documentation
- Academic integrity expectations and process descriptions

These policies are prominently linked throughout the NLU website and incorporated into course shells and student communications to ensure continuous visibility.

NLU's commitment to policy transparency begins at orientation. All incoming students receive:

- A folder with key office information and support resources, such as for Advising and the Center for Student Accessibility Resources
- A welcome booklet with an orientation checklist and letters from leadership (one for undergraduate students and one for graduate students)
- Access to NLUReady, which provides foundational guidance on registration, academic planning, student finance, and engagement

To encourage open communication and timely reporting, NLU also maintains the “Let Us Know” system (see 2.A.), a centralized platform allowing students to share concerns, file complaints, or request support anonymously. This system reinforces institutional accountability and promotes an environment where students understand their rights and the processes available to them when issues arise.

### **Degree Planning and Student-Facing Tools**

Admitted students have 24/7 access to degree audit tools through the NLU Portal. These systems provide real-time, transparent information on degree progress, completed and planned coursework, transfer credit application, and remaining program requirements. Students can also conduct “what-if” analyses to explore degree requirements across different programs. Together with academic advisors, these tools support informed decision-making and empower students to understand and track their academic journey.

NLU's Registrar's Office actively participates in state-level initiatives such as the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) and MyCreditsTransfer, further ensuring alignment and transparency in transfer practices. Through these partnerships, regularly updated systems, and clear communication channels, NLU ensures that students and the public receive accurate, timely, and easily accessible information that supports informed enrollment and academic decisions.

### **Outreach, Enrollment, Marketing**

NLU's outreach, enrollment, and marketing units uphold the university's commitment to transparency by ensuring that all public-facing materials, digital and print, accurately reflect program offerings, admissions requirements, tuition and financial aid information, and student support services. Marketing and recruitment materials are regularly reviewed for accuracy and alignment with current curricula, institutional policies, and accreditation requirements, ensuring that prospective students receive complete and reliable information

before enrollment in materials such as college brochures, program sheets, and flyers.

The Enrollment and Marketing unit plays a central role in operationalizing this transparency in its communications to potential students. Enrollment maintains structured, cross-functional verification processes with the Registrar's Office, Academic Affairs, Student Finance, and Marketing to confirm program requirements, deadlines, scholarship criteria, licensure disclosures, and policy updates. When institutional changes occur, such as catalog revisions or academic alerts, updates are promptly communicated through coordinated training, shared documentation, and internal communication channels to ensure staff are working from current and accurate information.

To support consistency and staff competency, Enrollment operates a centralized training and governance structure led by a Director of Training. Enrollment Specialists participate in monthly program-specific training and ongoing professional development aligned with institutional updates. All training materials are housed in a centralized Enrollment Training repository, which includes guidance on admissions and transfer policies, accreditation disclosures, tuition and scholarships, student support services, communication standards, and system use (e.g., Banner, Salesforce, and outreach platforms). This living repository ensures consistency across staff, modalities, and student populations.

Quality assurance is further reinforced through brand guidelines with standardized communication templates used across email, phone, text, live chat, events, and one-on-one advising. Templates and outreach materials are reviewed and updated collaboratively by Enrollment and Marketing when program, tuition, or policy changes occur. Version control is maintained through the university's Brand Folder, ensuring outdated materials are removed and replaced with approved content. Event preparation processes also require validating program details, scholarship criteria, and admissions requirements to ensure alignment across the website, catalog, and live presentations.

Enrollment communication systems, including Salesforce, Banner, and Zoom Events, are governed by data integrity standards to ensure consistency across institutional systems. Automated communications, inquiry forms, and data fields are reviewed regularly to reflect current offerings and prevent misrepresentation. Enrollment specialists are trained to document student interactions, clearly communicate boundaries of information, and elevate complex questions, particularly those related to licensure or policy, to appropriate academic or administrative offices.

An example of this is through transparent, consistent, and accountable processes for developing and managing partnerships that advance educational access and workforce development. Partnerships are initiated through multiple channels, with unit-specific processes that align to institutional policies. The Enrollment and Outreach partnership process is one example.

All partnership agreements utilize NLU's standardized Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) template, which includes a detailed exhibit outlining partner roles, responsibilities, and deliverables. Agreements involving financial or liability components are reviewed by the Vice President of Finance, while those involving marketing, outreach, or enrollment are reviewed by the Vice President of Marketing and Enrollment. Academic partnerships are additionally reviewed by the respective dean or faculty lead to confirm academic integrity and compliance.

Transparency is further ensured through open communication and documentation. Draft agreements are shared with partners for feedback prior to execution, and for accessibility and accountability, all signed MOAs are electronically stored in institutional systems of record, such as departmental network shared drives, Salesforce, or internship/practica tracking platforms. Renewals are proactively monitored and reviewed at least three months prior to expiration, using performance data and engagement metrics to guide decisions. This structured, transparent approach ensures that all collaborations are mission-aligned, well-documented, and beneficial to both students and partner organizations.

## **Student Finance**

Consistent with NLU's commitment to transparency and accuracy in all public communications, the University ensures that financial information is presented clearly and accessibly, in alignment with student needs. All tuition and fee schedules are publicly posted on the NLU website and are updated annually following formal approval by the Board of Trustees.

The Office of Student Finance provides individualized guidance to help students understand their full range of funding options, including federal and state aid, institutional scholarships, and payment plans. Advisors work closely with students to ensure they have a clear understanding of the financial aid process, from application through disbursement, so they can make informed decisions about how to pay for their education.

To promote accuracy and timeliness, NLU uses an automated financial aid review and packaging system that streamlines eligibility determinations and accelerates award disbursements. This system improves both the speed and precision of financial aid processing, enabling students to receive prompt notifications of their funding status and ensuring access to the resources they need for tuition, books, and living expenses.

Transparency in financial literacy and responsibility is further reinforced through financial aid and scholarship workshops, which educate students about grants, loans, work-study opportunities, and the obligations associated with receiving aid. These workshops, along with personalized advising, have led to measurable increases in FAFSA completion rates and scholarship participation. In 2023–2024, 76% of students completed the FAFSA, and 34% received a scholarship. In 2024–2025, 72% completed the FAFSA, and 35% received a scholarship. For 2025–2026 (to date), 73% of students have completed the FAFSA, and 31% have received a scholarship. By embedding financial education and support throughout the student journey, NLU ensures that learners are empowered with clear, accurate, and timely financial information — reinforcing the university's broader commitment to ethical practice and transparency in all institutional communications.

These efforts reflect NLU's commitment to presenting a full and truthful representation of its academic offerings, student experience, and institutional standards—ensuring clarity for prospective and current students, families, employers, and the broader community.

## **Sources**

- 2.A. 2.B. Institutional and Programmatic Accreditation
- 2.A. Let Us Know
- 2.B. 2026 NLU APR Form

- 2.B. Accreditation Status
- 2.B. Brand Folder
- 2.B. Consumer Information
- 2.B. Credit for Prior Learning
- 2.B. Illinois Articulation Initiative
- 2.B. My Credits Transfer
- 2.B. NLU Brand Guidelines
- 2.B. NLU Partnership MOA Agreement TEMPLATE
- 2.B. Program and Curriculum Development
- 2.B. Public Disclosures for Licensure and Certification Programs
- 2.B. Student Achievement Data
- 2.B. Student Finance
- 2.B. Transfer Articulation Guides
- 2.B. Transfer Credits
- 2.B. 3.D. First-Year Student Orientation
- 2.B. 3.D. NLUReady
- 3.D. Registrar
- 2.B. College Brochures
- 2.B. Fylers (sample)
- 2.B. Program Sheets (sample)
- 2.B. 3.D. Orientation Advising
- 2.B. 3.D. Orientation CSAR Flyer 2024
- 2.B. 3.D. NLU GR Orientation Booklet Winter 2026
- 2.B. 3.D. NLU UG Orientation Booklet Winter 2026
- 2.B. Financial Aid Workshops
- 2.B. Academic Alert Implementation Section (Page 7)
- 2.B. Partnerships Manual

## 2.C. Board Governance

In discharging its fiduciary duties, the institution's governing board is free from undue external influence and empowered to act in the best interests of the institution, including the students it serves.

### Argument

The NLU Board of Trustees operates independently of any external influence. Board members are not compensated and serve without political or proprietary ties. Their oversight responsibilities are clearly outlined in the Board Bylaws, which grant them authority over mission, presidential appointment, strategic and fiscal policy, and institutional integrity. The Board of Trustees delegates day-to-day management of the institution to the President, who in turn delegates authority to university officers to manage key areas.

Board members go through an orientation process to familiarize them with the institution, the academic portfolio, their role and responsibilities as board members, and the board's critical functions, including fiduciary oversight and strategy, evaluation of the president, and the conflict of interest policy. Each member of the Board of Trustees receives a copy of the bylaws and annually signs a Conflict of Interest Policy form.

Service as a Trustee carries with it a requirement of loyalty and fidelity to the university, and it is the responsibility of Trustees to govern the university's affairs honestly and economically, exercising best care, skill, and judgment for the benefit of the university.

The NLU Bylaws ensure that the governing board is acting in the best interests of the institution and preserving its independence from undue influence by donors, elected officials, ownership interests, or other external parties.

NLU Bylaws include, but are not limited to, the following powers:

- Determine and periodically review the University's purposes and mission.
- Evaluate and advance the quality of academic programs and educational outcomes.
- Establish policies for the appointment, promotion, tenure, and dismissal of faculty.
- Appoint the President as Chief Executive Officer and appoint or remove senior officers for just cause.
- Assess the President's performance and review their compensation.
- Approve and oversee the development and implementation of the strategic plan.
- Ensure fiscal integrity, protect institutional assets, and support fundraising and philanthropy.
- Preserve and protect the institution's autonomy, academic integrity, and civic responsibility.
- Review and approve institutional policies.
- Engage regularly with major institutional constituencies in collaboration with senior leadership.
- Maintain current governance practices and periodically assess board and committee performance.

To fulfill these responsibilities, the Board of Trustees is organized into five committees, whose charges are further outlined in their respective committee charters. Their purposes are summarized here:

- The Academic Affairs Committee (which also includes Student Affairs) oversees all aspects of the academic enterprise. The committee reviews and approves new programs and examines learning outcomes and program performance metrics. The committee also recommends tenure, promotion, and emeritus positions to the full board while also reviewing the student experience and student satisfaction. They ensure that all academic strategies reflected in the 2030 Strategic Plan are executed with fidelity.
- The Audit Committee works directly with the institution's auditors to ensure that appropriate controls are in place to support ethical fiscal, operational, and technology practices. The NLU Board of Trustees meets both openly and privately with the institution's external auditors biannually to review audit results, and this open dialogue ensures that any issues are identified immediately.
- The Executive Committee assumes the role of the Governance Committee and Compensation Committee and is also responsible for the recruitment of board members and oversees the board self-evaluation process. This committee also reviews overall institutional progress, and it oversees executive evaluation and compensation. The Executive Committee also has broad oversight over all institutional matters, working closely with the president.
- The Financial Affairs Committee provides oversight of the university's financial health, fiscal strategy, and long-term sustainability. Its responsibilities include reviewing and approving the annual budget; overseeing tuition and fee strategies; monitoring investment performance, endowment spending, and debt obligations; reviewing financial reporting and risk management practices; and advising on facilities planning.
- The Institutional Advancement Committee provides oversight and advisory support for the university's development and alumni relations efforts. It works to strengthen philanthropic support, public awareness, and community engagement. This committee advises the Board of Trustees on fundraising strategies, alumni engagement, and endowment growth.

Board members have numerous opportunities to engage meaningfully with the NLU community and its students. These include participation in the university's annual Fall Connection event, student panels at Board meetings, donor and community engagement events, and regular interaction with senior leadership. In addition, the Board has demonstrated proactive engagement by establishing targeted ad hoc committees in response to institutional priorities. For example, the Ad Hoc Persistence and Completion Committee, composed of Trustees, was formed to deepen understanding and engagement with the first-year student experience and advance student persistence efforts. Initiatives emerging from this work include a Trustee-led fireside chat series, guest speaking engagements, and mentorship opportunities that connect Board members directly with students. Collectively, these engagement mechanisms ensure Trustees remain informed about institutional performance, student experiences, and community needs, strengthening governance oversight and mission alignment.

The Board of Trustees embodies NLU's data-informed culture by reviewing the Board of Trustees Dashboard at each semi-annual meeting to oversee progress toward goals. This dashboard provides a visualization of key strategic metrics—enrollment, financial results,

student outcomes and satisfaction data, persistence data, and grants and gifts amounts—that can be used by the Board of Trustees for evidence-based decision making. Other dashboards are used for quick data visualization of trends and are a great resource for sharing the health of the university during cross-departmental and institution-wide meetings. More extensive and detailed analyses on operational and academic initiatives as they align with the strategic plan are discussed and provided during quarterly Board meetings.

Through its clearly defined authority, committee structure, and ongoing engagement with institutional leadership and stakeholders, the NLU Board of Trustees provides independent and effective governance of the university. The Board's policies, oversight practices, and commitment to fiduciary responsibility ensure that institutional decision-making remains aligned with the university's mission, strategic priorities, and long-term sustainability. By maintaining strong governance practices, exercising independent judgment, and utilizing data-informed oversight, the Board safeguards the integrity, autonomy, and educational quality of the institution while advancing NLU's commitment to student success and the public good.

## **Sources**

- 2.C. BOT Academic Affairs Charter
- 2.C. BOT Audit Committee Charter
- 2.C. BOT Executive Committee Charter
- 2.C. BOT Financial Affairs Committee Charter
- 2.C. BOT Institutional Advancement Committee Charter
- 2.C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality Policy
- 2.C. NLU Board of Trustees
- 2.C. NLU Bylaws - Revised December 2016 Final
- 1.C. 2.E. 3.C. Connections 2025 Email
- 2.C. NLU Board of Trustees Prospect Materials
- 2.C. Board Dashboard - March 12, 2026
- 2.C. Fireside Chat PowerPoint
- 2.C. GEN 103 BOT PeerMentor Pilot
- 2.C. Speakers Bureau Concept
- 2.C. NLU Persistence and Completion Taskforce Guardrails
- 2.C. Signed Conflict of Interest - BOT (sample)

## 2.D. Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression

The institution supports academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of knowledge as integral to high-quality teaching, learning and research.

### Argument

NLU affirms academic freedom as foundational to its mission and essential to the responsible acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge. The University ensures that faculty are free to teach, conduct research, publish, and express ideas consistent with standards of scholarly inquiry and professional integrity.

Academic freedom at NLU is formally articulated in Faculty Policy (FP) 122: Academic Freedom, approved by both the Faculty Senate and the Board of Trustees. This policy affirms that faculty are free to:

- Conduct research and publish findings without institutional censorship
- Teach course content consistent with their disciplinary training and professional standards
- Express ideas and opinions in and outside the classroom within appropriate professional boundaries

FP122 reflects widely accepted academic freedom principles, including those articulated by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). It builds upon protections embedded in the Faculty Association Constitution and Bylaws (2024), which codify faculty authority over academic matters, and Academic Policy (AP) 307: Intellectual Property and Confidential Information Policy, which clarifies faculty ownership of scholarly work and instructional materials. Together, these policies establish a clear institutional framework protecting faculty autonomy in teaching, research, and creative activity and can be found in the Faculty Guidebook.

As the representative body of the faculty, the NLU Faculty Senate serves as a central pillar in safeguarding academic freedom and freedom of expression across the institution. Through NLU's shared governance model, which includes tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty as well as committees focused on curriculum, faculty affairs, student success, and institutional leadership, the Senate ensures that faculty voices meaningfully inform university policies, academic standards, and institutional priorities. By fostering open dialogue, principled debate, and evidence-based decision-making, the Faculty Senate provides structured forums where ideas can be rigorously and respectfully examined. In doing so, it affirms the right of faculty to teach, research, publish, and engage in scholarly inquiry without undue interference while promoting a culture of intellectual diversity and professional responsibility.

Academic freedom is further operationalized through NLU's broader shared governance structures responsible for academic decision-making. The Faculty Senate maintains primary faculty oversight of academic matters, including curriculum, instructional standards, and policies related to academic freedom. Through the University Curriculum Council (UCC) and

college-level curriculum committees (see 3.A. and 3.C.), faculty define, review, and revise curricula, ensuring that disciplinary expertise and professional judgment guide pedagogical design and academic standards. Together, these governance bodies embed academic freedom within NLU's institutional processes for curriculum development and academic quality.

NLU provides formal due process protections for faculty who believe their academic rights have been infringed. The Faculty Appeals Policy (FP111) outlines defined procedures for filing appeals, establishes a faculty-led review committee, and provides mechanisms for resolution and escalation. In addition, the Employee Complaints Policy and the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Anti-Harassment Policy prohibit retaliation and ensure access to multiple reporting channels. These policies reinforce an environment in which faculty can exercise academic freedom without fear of reprisal.

In 2025, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) reviewed NLU's academic freedom policies and governance structures in response to a formal complaint alleging potential noncompliance with Core-Component 2.D. After evaluating the University's policies, procedures, and supporting documentation, HLC determined that NLU provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate compliance with its academic freedom obligations and that no further review was warranted. This determination affirms that NLU's academic freedom framework is clearly articulated, implemented, and effective in practice.

NLU also supports academic freedom through institutional structures that promote scholarly inquiry and instructional excellence. These include:

- The Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE), supports innovative pedagogy and provides faculty with resources to explore diverse teaching perspectives
- The University Library, ensures access to a wide range of scholarly resources to support inquiry and research
- The Research Support Group (RSG), assists with the development and dissemination of research
- The University Assessment Council (UAC), supports faculty-driven assessment best practices
- The Institutional Review Board (IRB), safeguards ethical research practices

These structures support faculty in exercising professional judgment and advancing knowledge within ethical and scholarly standards.

Freedom of expression is also extended to students. Student expression is encouraged in academic and co-curricular settings, including classroom dialogue, student organizations, and university forums. Student rights and responsibilities are clearly articulated in the Student Guidebook, which outlines expectations for academic integrity, respectful discourse, and conduct. Many programs also maintain discipline-specific handbooks that reinforce professional standards and expectations. Through these structures, NLU fosters an environment that supports diverse viewpoints, constructive dialogue, and intellectual rigor.

Through clearly defined policies, shared governance authority, due process protections, and institutional support systems, NLU creates an environment in which academic freedom and freedom of expression are actively protected for both faculty and students. These safeguards ensure rigorous, inclusive inquiry and uphold the standards necessary for

high-quality teaching, learning, and research.

## **Sources**

- 2.D. Academic Policy 307 Intellectual Property and Confidential Information Policy
- 2.D. Employee Complaints Policy
- 2.D. Equal Employment Opportunity and Anti-Harassment Policy
- 2.D. Faculty Association Constitution and Bylaws
- 2.D. Faculty Policy 111 Faculty Appeals Policy
- 2.D. Faculty Policy 122 Academic Freedom Policy
- 2.D. Faculty Senate
- 2.D. Institutional Research Board
- 2.D. Resources for Scholarship
- 3.B. 3.D. Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE)
- 3.D. University Library
- 3.E. University Assessment Council (UAC) Charter

## 2.E. Knowledge Acquisition, Discovery and Application

The institution adheres to policies and procedures that ensure responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge.

### Argument

NLU fosters a culture of intellectual inquiry, academic integrity, and responsible knowledge creation across all levels of the institution. Its policies, academic structures, library and instructional supports, and faculty development systems collectively ensure that knowledge is acquired, generated, evaluated, and applied in ways consistent with national standards for scholarship and ethical practice.

The University appoints faculty across three tracks, tenure, professional practice, and teaching, with defined roles in knowledge creation and dissemination. Tenure and professional practice faculty are explicitly expected to produce thought leadership as part of their academic responsibilities, while teaching-track faculty contribute through evidence-based pedagogy, curricular innovation, and applied instructional practice. These expectations are codified in faculty evaluation and promotion policies, ensuring consistency, transparency, and accountability in scholarly activity.

To operationalize these expectations, NLU's Faculty Performance Evaluation (FPE) framework and Awarding Promotion, Tenure, and Multi-year Appointments policies include Thought Leadership as a formal evaluation domain for tenure and professional practice faculty, with clearly defined, track-specific thresholds for advancement in rank (see 1.B. and 3.C.).

NLU has substantially expanded its infrastructure to support high-quality scholarship and ethical dissemination of knowledge. The University provides centralized guidance on scholarly pathways and expectations, internal grant funding to support research development, and supplemental funding to facilitate dissemination of faculty work to professional and public audiences. In addition, NLU has strengthened its research capacity through external investment, including a federally funded Research, Development, and Infrastructure (RDI) grant, which enhances institutional support for research: grant development, interdisciplinary collaboration, and responsible research practices. This grant intends to provide a pathway for NLU to achieve Carnegie Research 2 (R2) classification. Collectively, these policies, resources, and procedures ensure that faculty scholarship at NLU is rigorous, mission-aligned, and meaningfully applied in service of the public good.

Academic integrity is maintained through a formal Academic Honesty Policy (AP302), detailed in student and program handbooks, and clear expectations for ethical conduct across all academic programs. Faculty also share best practices at monthly department meetings, university committees, and the Fall Connections event to kick off the new school year, which is discussed further in 3.C.

Academic integrity principles are embedded directly into NLU's curricular and course design practices through course templates and instructional practices developed in collaboration

with the Learning Experience Design (LXD) team. Course material includes clear guidance on academic honesty expectations, plagiarism prevention resources, APA and MLA citation guides, ethical use of AI and emerging technologies, and student conduct standards.

LXD works with faculty to design assignments that emphasize original work, responsible synthesis of information, and ethical decision-making. Courses include explicit instructional modules that teach students how to evaluate sources, cite appropriately, and use digital tools responsibly, reinforcing a culture of integrity across disciplines.

NLU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensures that all research involving human subjects adheres to federal regulations and national ethical standards. IRB protocols, forms, and training resources are embedded into doctoral and graduate-level research courses.

Students conducting research, as part of dissertations, theses, capstones, or applied projects, receive training in:

- Ethical study design
- Participant consent and confidentiality
- Data security and responsible data management
- Citation ethics and avoidance of academic misconduct

This ensures that graduates understand not only how to conduct rigorous research, but how to do so responsibly.

The University Library's system plays a central role in promoting responsible knowledge acquisition and ethical research practices. Librarians provide course-integrated instruction and standalone workshops on:

- Evaluating scholarly sources for credibility and bias
- Identifying misinformation and non-scholarly sources
- Navigating academic databases (e.g., ProQuest, EBSCO, PsycINFO)
- Understanding copyright, authorship, and fair-use principles
- Citation management tools (Zotero, RefWorks)
- Locating discipline-specific peer-reviewed research

The Library maintains extensive guides, tutorials, and online research modules. Librarians partner with faculty across colleges to embed tailored research instruction into first-year seminars, graduate methods courses, and doctoral research sequences.

Together, these supports ensure that students develop strong information literacy skills, essential for responsible scholarship and civic engagement (Core Component 1.C.).

As digital technologies reshape academic research and learning, NLU provides guidance to ensure their ethical use. The Library, CTLE, and LXD jointly offer:

- AI ethics workshops (LibGuide and recorded sessions)
- Faculty guidance on developing course-level AI policies
- Instruction on avoiding algorithmic bias and protecting privacy
- Best practices for evaluating AI-generated content, including citation expectations

In alignment with Pillar 5 of NLU's updated priorities, the university established an Artificial

Intelligence (AI) Steering Committee to ensure the ethical and responsible use of emerging technologies across the university. This cross-functional committee strengthens institutional capacity to respond by remaining informed, proactive, and strategic regarding advancements in AI, educating the university community, assessing the impacts of AI, and recommending AI deployments and strategies aligned with institutional priorities. Members of the committee will be responsible for three main areas of work to accomplish these priorities: Community Education and Engagement; Knowledge, Leadership, and Monitoring; and Strategic Advisory.

This structure ensures that AI use at NLU is transparent, ethical, and aligned with academic integrity and institutional priorities, guiding students and faculty in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. A focus on AI literacy will also greatly benefit students entering AI-enhanced workplaces. Students also receive direct instruction through course-based modules on responsible AI use, digital privacy, and verification of online sources. These structures reinforce responsible research as technology evolves.

Professional development is embedded in NLU's faculty support structure. The Vice Provost for Faculty Support oversees university-wide initiatives, including:

- Annual \$1,000 professional development allocation for each full-time faculty member
- Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) fellowships
- Seed Grants supporting research that may lead to external funding
- A Thought Leadership Dissemination Fund (AY 2025), supporting presentations at national/international conferences

The Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE) (discussed in 3.A. and 3.D.) provides extensive programming, including:

- Teaching Excellence Framework workshops
- Quality Matters certification support
- Instructional design training
- Research methods seminars
- New faculty onboarding (including JumpStart and "Excellence in Online and Remote Teaching")

Through these development pathways, faculty remain current in their fields, engaged in scholarly work, and equipped to teach ethical research practices to students.

Graduate and professional programs reinforce responsible research through rigorous academic structures:

- PsyD, EdD, and PhD programs require dissertations with original research
- The MS Applied in Behavioral Analysis program requires a thesis
- Doctoral committees evaluate research design, IRB compliance, data analysis, and oral defense
- Courses include scaffolded research assignments emphasizing synthesis, ethical design, and scholarly writing
- Doctoral candidates have the opportunity to showcase their scholarship and research at the Doctoral Research Symposium

To remain current on matters in their fields, faculty in the College of Psychology and

Behavioral Sciences and the Graduate School of Business Leadership also maintain discipline-specific professional credentials (e.g., BCBA, CPA, JD, SHRM), complete continuing education, conduct applied research, and participate in national conferences, strengthening the ethical application of knowledge in academic and workplace contexts.

Undergraduate students also participate in structured research experiences. UGC hosts an Annual Research Symposium, where students present original research as part of their major, minor, or Honors Program studies. Through this process, they gain additional training in research design, research methods, and academic honesty, preparing them for advanced study and civic engagement in their fields. NLU has also partnered with NASA's Open Science initiative, offering workshops and events that introduce students to ethical data use and open scientific inquiry.

Through these integrated policies, research oversight, library and instructional supports, academic program structures, and faculty development, NLU ensures that both faculty and students engage in responsible acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge. These efforts uphold the institution's mission and advance academic excellence in the service of broader societal good.

## Sources

- 2.E Faculty Policy 103 Faculty Performance Evaluation
- 2.E. ABA Thesis Manual
- 2.E. Academic Honesty Recorded Sessions Page
- 2.E. Academic Policy 302 Academic Honesty Policy
- 2.E. AI Faculty Guidance
- 2.E. AI Steering Committee Structural Overview
- 2.E. Best Practices - AI Content combined
- 2.E. Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE)
- 2.E. Faculty Performance Evaluation 2026 Kickoff Email
- 2.E. Faculty Performance Evaluation Support
- 2.E. Faculty Policy 104 Awarding Promotion, Tenure, and-Multi-year Appointments
- 2.E. Final Research Defense Rubric
- 2.E. Institutional Research Board
- 2.E. Instruction on Avoiding Algorithmic Bias and Protecting Privacy Workshop
- 2.E. ISPP Dissertation Manual
- 2.E. Learning Design and Experience
- 2.E. LibGuide for Academic Honesty
- 2.E. Library Events and Workshops
- 2.E. Library Help and Research Guides
- 2.E. New FPE Tool 2026 Reviewer
- 2.E. Research and Scholarship at NLU
- 2.E. University Library
- 1.C. 2.E. 3.C. Connections 2025 Email
- 3.C. NLU Faculty Hiring and Credentialing Website
- 3.D. Teaching Excellence Framework - Designer and Teacher
- 2.E. Doctoral Research Symposium
- 2.E UGC Research Symposium - original student work example
- 2.E. Undergraduate Research Symposium (forms)

- 2.E. RDI Grant

## **Criterion 2 - Summary**

In fulfilling its mission, the institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

### **Argument**

National Louis University (NLU) demonstrates a strong commitment to integrity, transparency, and ethical practice across all operations. Clearly defined policies, governance structures, and oversight processes guide decision-making and ensure accountability for faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees. These frameworks, supported by training and reporting mechanisms, promote ethical conduct and fair, consistent practices.

Transparency is reflected in accurate and accessible communication with students and the public through the academic catalog, website, and required consumer disclosures. Governance processes ensure that institutional information, including academic policies and financial obligations, remains current and reliable.

The Board of Trustees provides independent oversight, safeguarding the university's mission and financial integrity. NLU also upholds academic freedom and ethical scholarship through faculty governance, academic integrity policies, and research oversight, reinforcing a culture of integrity across the institution.

### **Sources**

*There are no sources.*

## 3 - Teaching and Learning for Student Success

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The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

### 3.A. Educational Programs

The institution maintains learning goals and outcomes that reflect a level of rigor commensurate with college-level work, including by program level and the content of each of its educational programs.

#### Argument

National Louis University (NLU) ensures academic quality and rigor through integrated processes for curriculum approval, learning outcomes assessment, course design, and program review. The university offers certificates, associate's, bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees, as well as endorsements and credit for prior learning. Across all credential levels, programs are designed to reflect appropriate expectations for content, breadth, and rigor and are informed by disciplinary standards, specialized accreditor requirements, and workforce expectations.

#### NLU Curriculum Approval Process

NLU's Curriculum Approval Process engages a number of academic experts across the institution to review all aspects of new and revised programs and courses, ensuring rigor commensurate with each program's level and content. The process is outlined in NLU's Curriculum Management System User's Guide with deadlines posted online. A key aspect of producing strong academic programming at NLU is aligning the institution's University Learning Outcomes (ULOs) with the Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) that underpin programs and the Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) that outline individual course content.

NLU's ULOs are skills the institution seeks to equip each student with by the time they have completed their program, regardless of the college or degree level. To create ULOs, NLU uses the five themes from the Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualification Profile (DQP), a framework used by over 900 institutions, and has added a sixth theme to complete the student experience. The six ULOs are as follows:

1. **Specialized Knowledge:** This category addresses what students in any specialization, major field of study, or career pathway should demonstrate within that specialization.
2. **Broad and Integrative Knowledge:** This category asks students to bring together learning from industry knowledge, experience, and/or different fields of study to

discover and explore the implications of concepts and questions that bridge essential areas of learning/practice as well as integrate their knowledge to advance solutions in support of a humane, just, and democratic society.

3. **Intellectual Skills:** This category includes analytic inquiry, use of information resources, engaging diverse perspectives, ethical reasoning, quantitative fluency, and communicative fluency.
4. **Applied and Collaborative Learning:** This category emphasizes what students can do with what they know. Students are asked to demonstrate their learning by addressing unscripted problems in scholarly inquiry, at work, and in other settings outside the classroom, individually and in teams.
5. **Civic and Global Learning:** This category recognizes higher education's responsibilities both to democracy and the global community. Students integrate their knowledge and skills by addressing and responding to civic, social, environmental, economic, equity, inclusion, and social justice challenges at local, national, and global levels.
6. **Professional Skills (added to the DQP themes by NLU):** This category addresses the skills all students need to succeed in their careers after college. Students identify the attributes that contribute to and create effective workplace relationships. Students explore leadership concepts that bridge multiple careers and skill levels.

The DQP framework is intentionally scaffolded across degree levels at NLU, ensuring that students encounter consistent foundational learning outcomes that increase in complexity, depth, and rigor as they progress from certificates and associate degrees through bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs.

General education content and courses align with the ULOs, making assessment of general education outcomes a subset of the measurement of the ULOs. The ULOs align with and reflect NLU's mission and values, as well as the skills the institution teaches students. Rubrics ensure consistent definitions and measures and provide students with familiarity with concepts across the curriculum, helping them recognize the skills necessary to demonstrate throughout their academic journey.

PLOs and ULOs are aligned with all programmatic curriculum through curriculum mapping to ensure students receive appropriate instruction on concepts, reinforcement of those concepts, and assessment of the outcomes to determine student achievement. PLOs and CLOs are created using guidelines developed by the institution that map to degree-level expectations and are regularly reviewed through the Academic Program Review (APR) process. All academic programs at NLU participate in an annual PLO assessment to determine how well students are achieving the program's core objectives and to identify specific areas of student learning, ensuring students are learning what the program is designed to teach.

| Examples of ULO-PLO Alignment at NLU |                          |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| University Learning Outcome          | Program Learning Outcome |

|                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ULO 1: Specialized Knowledge            | <b>MA in Psychology - CPBS</b><br>PLO1 - Demonstrate competency in core theoretical areas in psychology, including human development, social psychology, research methods, abnormal psychology, and personality theories.                                                                                                                                                                             |
| ULO2: Broad and Integrative Knowledge   | <b>AAS in Culinary Arts - Kendall College</b><br>PLO2 - Guest Experience: Students will be able to recognize various customer service styles, cultural awareness, diversity, inclusiveness, and sensory perception, to provide a competitive guest experience.                                                                                                                                        |
| ULO 3: Intellectual Skills              | <b>BA in Criminal Justice - UGC</b><br>PLO6 - Demonstrate critical thinking skills, including the ability to assess the credibility of information, interpret data, problem solve using multiple sources, and engage in ethical decision making.                                                                                                                                                      |
| ULO 4: Applied & Collaborative Learning | <b>Master of Business Administration - GSBL</b><br>PLO2 - Critique team performance in completing a team project.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| ULO 5: Civic & Global Learning          | <b>Master's in Early Childhood Education - NCE</b><br>PLO2 (aligned to NAEYC Standard 2: Family-teacher partnerships) - Candidates value the importance and complex characteristics of children's families and communities; they are able to create respectful, reciprocal relationships that support and empower families, and to involve all families in their children's development and learning. |
| ULO 6: Professional Skills              | <b>Medical Assistant Certificate - Accelerate U</b><br>PLO9 - Students will demonstrate clinical skills according to current hospital and ambulatory care center standards.                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

### Academic Rigor Supported by Learning Design

Academic rigor and consistency across modalities at NLU are reinforced through a collaborative course development process led by the Learning Experience Design team (LXD). Course development follows a triadic partnership model that brings together faculty subject-matter expertise, instructional design support, and library resource expertise. Faculty Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) are responsible for disciplinary content and academic expectations, while LXD instructional designers ensure alignment with evidence-based pedagogy, accessibility standards, and effective online and hybrid learning practices. Library

faculty contribute expertise in academic resources, information literacy, and ethical use of sources.

Course development follows a formal, university-wide planning and budgeting process, as outlined on the Program and Curriculum Development web page, and is guided by nationally recognized instructional design practices, including the Quality Matters (QM) framework. Academic programs begin by identifying courses in need of new development, revision, redevelopment, or improvement based on APR and assessment data. These proposals are reviewed through a shared governance process that includes the individuals developing the course or program, college leaders, LXD, and the Provost Office. Approved courses are incorporated into the annual course development budget, which supports the design of approximately 180–200 courses per year across four 10–12 week development cycles (Summer, Fall, Winter, and Spring).

To ensure transparency, accountability, and effective project management, LXD maintains detailed course development guidelines, standardized development timelines, and documented workflows that track course development activity across colleges, terms, and funding sources. At the start of development, the SME and LXD designer co-create a course map, a detailed blueprint outlining weekly module objectives, learning activities, assessments, and aligned outcomes. All courses must demonstrate alignment among module-level outcomes, course-level learning outcomes, and (where applicable) program-level outcomes. A standardized Outcomes Alignment Table is used to track and validate this alignment. In addition, each course must complete a Credit Hour Compliance Form, documenting how instructional time and student workload meet the Carnegie unit definition of credit hours. These artifacts are reviewed by LXD, the Program Chair, and the SME as part of the course approval process and prior to course launch.

To further support standardization and ensure course and section-level consistency, NLU adopted Simple Syllabus as a university-wide platform in 2022. This dynamic, web-based system replaces static Microsoft Word documents and supports consistency of syllabi by automatically populating syllabi with official course and policy data from institutional systems. Faculty customize only select fields, ensuring each syllabus remains aligned with the approved course template. Program chairs are invited to provide structured feedback on the platform and its templates through a centralized feedback form.

In addition, all course designs in Accelerate U, CPBS, GSBL, Kendall, NCE, and UGC, including the BSN program, include clearly defined assessment rubrics that articulate performance expectations and grading criteria aligned to course learning outcomes. Rubrics are collaboratively developed by the SME and LXD during the course mapping process and embedded within the D2L course template to ensure consistency in evaluation, promote transparency for students, and support alignment of instruction with learning objectives.

All courses are reviewed at least every five years, while many, especially new programs, may conduct more frequent initial reviews and revisions. Course reviews ensure course content, instructional strategies, learning resources, and assessments remain current, rigorous, and responsive to student learning data and institutional priorities.

## **Admissions**

NLU's admissions requirements, including minimum GPA, ensure students are ready for the

rigor of NLU programs. These requirements are established during New Program Development, approved by curriculum committees, and reviewed during Academic Program Review.

NLU's undergraduate admissions promote an accessible education for students while setting them up for academic success. The GPA required by the UGC is 2.0, providing broad access for undergraduate degrees and aligning with NLU's access-oriented mission and the institution's wraparound services to help students develop their college skills and support them along the way.

In addition, many UGC programs (such as education preparation, social work, and nursing) have distinct admissions requirements to ensure students are prepared for the necessary levels of academic rigor. For example, in the Bachelor's in Nursing (BSN) program, student applicants must have completed a list of pre-requisite courses (primarily GenEds) with a C or better within the last 5 years from a 2- or 4-year accredited school and must have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher for all college-level coursework.

NLU's graduate admission standards ensure that admitted students are prepared for the pace, complexity, and intellectual demands of graduate study. Specific requirements vary by program and discipline, but all graduate applicants are evaluated through a holistic review process that considers prior academic performance, professional experience, and demonstrated alignment with the program's learning outcomes.

NLU's Admissions Policy states that graduate applicants must hold a conferred bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited institution (or international equivalent) and meet a minimum GPA of 3.0 or higher. Some programs have structured review or petition pathways for applicants with GPAs in the 2.75–2.99 range. Students in this category may be admitted on a two-course review status and are monitored to ensure that the first two courses of study meet a 3.0 or higher GPA, such as in certain programs in GSBL.

Beyond academic credentials, many graduate programs require supplemental materials. These may include personal statements or essays, letters of recommendation, résumés or CVs, and in some cases, interviews or faculty review. Programs leading to licensure, certification, or advanced professional practice may include additional expectations, such as prerequisite coursework, proof of licensure, background checks, or compliance with regulatory and disclosure requirements, such as in the Master of Teaching program. Doctoral and specialist programs typically reflect the highest level of rigor, often requiring more extensive writing requirements, faculty interviews, and demonstrated research readiness, as in the Psy.D. in Clinical Psychology program. These additional expectations support student success while aligning NLU programming with industry standards and regulations.

## **Credit Hour Compliance**

In 2025, NLU revised its Credit Hour Compliance (CHC) policy to increase accessibility and information sharing across the campus. The policy ensures compliance with the federal definition of credit hour and details the assignment of credit for all types of courses, disciplines, programs, credential levels, formats, and course modalities, and reflects practices and expectations across academic units. Standard courses require one hour of direct instruction and a minimum of two hours of non-direct instruction for approximately

fifteen weeks (for semester courses) or ten weeks (for quarter courses), while non-standard courses require the instructional equivalent of 30 total hours per quarter credit hour and 45 total hours per semester credit hour. Student engagement in courses such as laboratories, studios, clinicals, practica, internships, and field experiences may include a combination of direct supervision, instruction, site-based activities, independent study, reflection, and other instructional methods. CHC is followed throughout NLU's academic programs and requires the efforts of multiple departments throughout the university, including the academic units. A [CHC Guidance document](#) is available on the university website.

## **Regulatory Agencies & Specialized Accreditation**

Detailed on [NLU's Accreditation Status webpage](#), many of NLU's programs hold specialized accreditation and external regulatory oversight to establish additional standards and expectations for academic quality beyond institutional review processes. Specialized accreditations provide structured guidance concerning faculty qualifications, curriculum design, assessment practices, and ongoing program evaluation. In addition to programmatic accreditors, NLU maintains compliance with state and national regulatory agencies that authorize, approve, and monitor academic offerings across locations and modalities. This agency oversight, detailed at the bottom of the [Accreditation Status page](#), ensures that NLU's programs meet statutory, licensure, and authorization requirements related to program content, instructional delivery, student disclosures, and institutional accountability. Compliance with these standards supports program quality and alignment with professional and industry expectations and the institution's commitment to academic rigor.

## **Advisory Boards and Curriculum Quality**

As discussed in 1.B., NLU maintains program-level Advisory Boards that provide discipline-specific feedback regarding workforce expectations, licensure requirements, and emerging professional competencies. Faculty and program leaders consider advisory input alongside assessment data, accreditation standards, and program review findings when refining program learning outcomes and curricular design.

A number of programmatic improvements have resulted directly from advisory board engagement. For example, the IL Counseling program's Advisory Board—comprised of licensed practitioners, clinical supervisors, and community mental health leaders—provides regular feedback on evolving licensure expectations, clinical training needs, and emerging areas of practice within the counseling profession. Advisory input has informed ongoing refinements to clinical training expectations, practicum and internship experiences, and curriculum alignment with Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards to ensure graduates are well-prepared for professional licensure and contemporary counseling practice.

Similarly, engagement from the Industry Advisory Council (IAC) informed the rebranding and redevelopment of the Communications major into Communications and Media, with expanded digital media integration across the curriculum. IAC members provided content expertise in revising courses such as MES 310 *Sound Essentials: Podcasting*, MES 410 *Video Essentials: Short Film*, and MES 207 *Contemporary Media Communications*. The IAC also contributed directly to the launch of a [new Marketing major](#), serving as subject-matter experts in the development of courses, including MKT 422: Consumer Behavior and MKT

310: *Branding and Content Creation*. IAC members have taught courses, served as guest lecturers, and facilitated new employer partnerships and experiential learning opportunities.

While advisory boards offer market-informed guidance, authority over curriculum, academic standards, and degree requirements remain with faculty through established shared governance and curriculum approval processes (see 3.A. and 3.C.) to maintain college-level rigor while remaining professionally relevant.

### **Academic Rigor and College Curriculum Committees**

In addition to oversight by the UCC, each college maintains its own College Curriculum Committee responsible for safeguarding academic quality and ensuring degree-level rigor (as outlined in the College Constitutions for CPBS, GSBL, Kendall, NCE, and UGC). These committees review and approve new courses, curricular revisions, learning outcomes, assessment strategies, and credit hour assignments. Through faculty-led governance structures, NLU ensures that expectations for knowledge, intellectual skills, applied learning, and professional competencies are appropriately differentiated across undergraduate, graduate, and terminal degree levels.

### **Academic Rigor in Programmatic Innovation**

NLU's Learn and Earn in 3 (LE3) bachelor's model represents an innovative approach to degree completion that integrates academic coursework with structured workplace experience. Because of its distinctive delivery model, LE3 incorporates additional safeguards to ensure academic rigor equivalent to traditional pathways. In LE3's BS in Organizational Leadership and Development, learning outcomes are assessed through multi-layered evaluation processes, including authentic workplace artifacts, faculty-scored reflective analysis, structured rubrics, and supervisor evaluations. Faculty retain primary responsibility for assessing academic performance and ensuring that demonstrated competencies meet baccalaureate-level expectations for critical thinking, applied knowledge, ethical reasoning, and intellectual synthesis. To further reinforce rigor, LE3 maintains a Subject Matter Expert (SME) Advisory Board that reviews course design for academic integrity, workforce alignment, and inclusivity. The SME Advisory Board provides an external perspective, while curricular authority remains with faculty and the UCC. Through structured assessment cycles, clearly defined performance criteria, and layered review processes, LE3 ensures its experiential model meets degree-level standards aligned with institutional expectations.

### **Consistency of Academic Rigor across Degree Levels**

The application of credit toward multiple academic programs and credentials is a standard practice at many higher education institutions. At NLU, this occurs in advanced-standing programs, where students take graduate-level coursework as undergraduates. The coursework can be applied to both their undergraduate and graduate level programs. Examples of these programs include the Public Policy concentration, which can be applied to the Master of Public Administration (MPA), and the Human Services Management concentration, which can be applied to the Master of Health Services Administration (MHA). These are graduate-level courses cross-listed as undergraduate courses, with the same CLOs at both levels (such as in PPA 500 in the MHA program). There are a number of stipulations for these situations, including detailed student eligibility criteria and structured

pathways created by faculty and programs. The full policy is detailed in [Academic Alert #2023-15](#) and aligns with NLU's mission to provide inspiring, empowering educational opportunities that also ensure the academic rigor befitting undergraduate and graduate programming.

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### 3.B. Exercise of Intellectual Inquiry

The institution's educational programs engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in practicing modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

#### Argument

NLU places a high value on developing students' intellectual skills to support lifelong learning, professional success, and civic engagement. Therefore, the practice of intellectual inquiry and communication is foundational to NLU's academic programming and embedded across institutional University Learning Outcomes (ULOs) and aligned to Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) at all levels.

#### Intellectual Inquiry in ULO 3: Intellectual Skills

ULO 3: Intellectual Skills, focuses on analytic inquiry, use of information resources, engagement with diverse perspectives, ethical reasoning, quantitative fluency, and communicative fluency. This ULO emphasizes that students should confront and interpret ideas and arguments from different points of reference (e.g., cultural, technological, political). As a result, ULO 3 is embedded in all degree-seeking programs at the institution so that each student graduates with a suite of core intellectual skills that will serve them well no matter their work or environment. Program learning outcomes at the undergraduate and graduate levels emphasize broad-based intellectual skills such as critical thinking, information literacy, collaboration, and creativity. These outcomes are embedded in course assignments, signature assessments, and co-curricular experiences.

| Examples of PLO Alignment to ULO 3 Across the Colleges at NLU                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>NLU ULO 3: Intellectual Skills:</b> This category includes both traditional and nontraditional cognitive skills: analytic inquiry, use of information resources, engaging diverse perspectives, ethical reasoning, quantitative fluency, and communicative fluency. |                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>CPBS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | MA in Psychology - PLO3. Students will be able to analyze and apply psychological theory and research.                                                                                       |
| <b>GSBL</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | MS in Organizational Leadership - PLO 2: Ethics. Analyze ethical and legal principles to apply in leadership and business settings.                                                          |
| <b>Kendall College</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | BA in Culinary Management - PLO 3: Wellness: Students will be able to apply allergy awareness, safety, environmental stewardship, nutrition, science, and sanitation in culinary situations. |

| Examples of PLO Alignment to ULO 3 Across the Colleges at NLU |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>NCE</b>                                                    | MAT in Elementary Education - PLO 3: The candidate works with colleagues, families, and communities to establish positive, collaborative, and supportive learning environments that encourage active engagement in learning and self-motivation.                                                  |
| <b>UGC</b>                                                    | BA in Criminal Justice - PLO 6: Demonstrate critical thinking skills, including the ability to assess the credibility of information, interpret data, problem solve using multiple sources, and engage in ethical decision making.                                                                |
| <b>UGC</b>                                                    | BS in Nursing - PLO 6: Integrate ethical and social values along with legal knowledge to support clinical judgment and decision making in professional nursing practice.                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Accelerate U</b>                                           | Medical Assistant Certificate - PLO 3: Students will apply legal and ethical resolutions to situations in the healthcare setting.                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Learn &amp; Earn in 3</b>                                  | B.S. in Organizational Leadership and Development - PLO 1: Exhibit proficiency in durable skills by integrating academic knowledge with real-world work experiences, solving complex organizational problems, and creating an Experiential Learning Portfolio showcasing mastery of these skills. |

## Developing Skills Adaptable to Changing Environments

In addition to disciplinary inquiry, NLU prepares students with transferable skills that support adaptability across changing professional, technological, and societal environments. These skills are formalized through ULO 6: Professional Skills, which emphasizes leadership, collaboration, and effective workplace relationships across programs.

| Examples of ULO 6 Across the Colleges at NLU                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                               |                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>NLU ULO 6: Professional Skills:</b> This category addresses the skills all students need to succeed in their careers after college. Students identify the attributes that contribute to and create effective workplace relationships. Students explore leadership concepts that bridge multiple careers and skill levels. |                               |                                                                         |
| <b>College</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>PLO Alignment Examples</b> | <b>Additional Methods of Developing Skills in Changing Environments</b> |

| <b>Examples of ULO 6 Across the Colleges at NLU</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>CPBS</b>                                         | MS in Counseling Virtual - PLO5: Counseling Skills. Students will demonstrate the ability to describe, compare, contrast, and apply major counseling skills and approaches to practice.                          | Clinical placements                                                      |
| <b>GSBL</b>                                         | MS in Business Data Analytics - PLO 4: Apply analytical methodologies to gather insights via data access, production transparency, and analytical transparency to inform decision-making.                        | Internships                                                              |
| <b>Kendall College</b>                              | AAS in Culinary - PLO 4: Menu Operations: Students will be able to discuss purchasing and receiving, recipes and standardization, mise en place/timing, and menu formats, and apply them in culinary operations. | Internships                                                              |
| <b>NCE</b>                                          | MAT in SPE: - PLO/Standard 5: Supporting Learning Using Effective Instruction                                                                                                                                    | CAEP Domain 3, Field or Clinical Experiences; Clinical Hour requirements |
| <b>UGC</b>                                          | BA Human Services - PLO 5: Systematically analyze service needs; plan appropriate intervention strategies, services, and implementation; and evaluate outcomes.                                                  | Internships, Practica, Student Teaching                                  |
| <b>UGC</b>                                          | Bachelor of Science in Nursing - PLO7: Value lifelong learning as a necessary component of professional nursing practice.                                                                                        | Clinical Experiences                                                     |
| <b>AU</b>                                           | Medical Assistant Certificate - PLO10: Students will demonstrate awareness of cultural humility, diversity, equity, and inclusion when interacting with patients.                                                | Clinical Externship, Practica                                            |

| Examples of ULO 6 Across the Colleges at NLU |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                       |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Learn &amp; Earn in 3 (LE3)</b>           | B.S. in Organizational Leadership and Development - PLO1: Exhibit proficiency in durable skills by integrating academic knowledge with real-world work experiences, solving complex organizational problems, and creating an Experiential Learning Portfolio showcasing mastery of these skills. | Professional Seminars |

## **Inquiry and Skills in Clinical, Internship, and Practica Experiences**

NLU ensures that students develop their intellectual and professional skills outside the university through required community-based courses, clinical experiences, and service-learning initiatives. Student teaching placements in NCE and UGC provide real-world classroom experience in Chicago Public Schools, suburban school districts, and Florida school districts. Internships through Career Bridge (discussed further below in 3.D.) match students with local businesses, nonprofits, and public service agencies, while clinical practicums in healthcare programs train students while filling critical workforce gaps in hospitals and clinics. In CPBS programs, students provide clinical hours in a broad range of settings. Partnerships with employers and industry leaders improve job placement outcomes and provide hands-on learning experiences that build real-world career skills.

## **Learning Design (LXD) Supporting Intellectual Inquiry and Developing Skills**

As mentioned in 3.A., the Learning Design (LXD) Team at NLU supports the curriculum and development of all academic programming at NLU. LXD works with program chairs and deans to align course design with state requirements, including the IAI General Education Core Curriculum (GECC) and general education competency requirements in information literacy, critical thinking, and inquiry-based learning. Course designs integrate emerging technologies to help students develop skills adaptable to changing environments. The LXD team, in partnership with the University Library, also ensures that course materials selected for course development projects are current and reflect trends and industry developments. They provide ongoing course improvements and redevelopment to help programs make regular content updates. Some course developments include portfolio assessments and experiential learning that showcase student work in research, creative projects, and applied inquiry.

## **Learning Support and Intellectual Inquiry**

The Learning Support Center fosters Intellectual Inquiry by actively engaging students in the processes of collecting, analyzing, and communicating information across disciplines such as writing, math, and computer science. Through personalized tutoring, targeted workshops, and close collaboration with faculty, Learning Support specialists guide students in applying modes of intellectual inquiry and creative problem-solving. Often, Learning Support Specialists are embedded in writing and research-intensive courses as well. Learning Support staff use evidence-based strategies to scaffold learning, encouraging students to think critically and independently while developing adaptable skills that transcend specific

subjects.

## Intellectual Inquiry and Developing Skills Across the Colleges

While institutional learning outcomes provide a shared foundation, each college embeds intellectual inquiry in discipline-appropriate ways aligned with professional standards and accreditation expectations.

- **College of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences (CPBS):** CPBS embeds intellectual inquiry at the highest levels of scholarly rigor across its graduate and doctoral programs. Doctoral students in Clinical Psychology (PsyD), Counselor Education and Supervision (PhD), and Community Psychology (PhD) complete original dissertations that require the formulation of a research question grounded in theory and literature, development of a sound methodological design, data collection and analysis, and a formal oral defense before a faculty committee. The ISPP Dissertation Manual provides students guidance on that program's expected levels of intellectual inquiry, while students in the Applied Behavior Analysis master's program complete a thesis. Across programs, students engage in the critical evaluation of empirical literature, the application of research methodologies appropriate to their discipline, and the synthesis of findings into defensible conclusions that contribute to professional practice and scholarship.
- **Graduate School of Business and Leadership (GSBL):** GSBL embeds intellectual inquiry through applied research, strategic analysis, and data-informed decision-making aligned with contemporary business and public-sector leadership practice. A number of programs require RES 510 – Critical Thinking and Research Skills, a gateway course that strengthens graduate-level writing, analytical reasoning, and applied research methodology. Across programs such as the MBA, MHA, and MPA, intellectual inquiry culminates in capstone or integrative projects that require students to synthesize theory and practice, analyze organizational data, and propose strategic solutions grounded in evidence. Through case analyses, simulations, and project-based assessments, students develop advanced competencies in ethical reasoning, leadership judgment, and systems thinking.
- **Kendall College:** Intellectual inquiry is embedded throughout Kendall's educational programming through research-driven coursework, critique-based learning, and experiential education. Students regularly collect, analyze, and communicate information through written assignments, presentations, design critiques, and applied research projects. In culinary programs, for example, in KCUL115 and KCUL127, students research recipes, techniques, ingredients, and cultural contexts, evaluate sources, and adapt formulations based on evidence and outcomes. Lab practice and project-based learning foster creative problem-solving and disciplinary modes of inquiry, while internships and community-engaged learning experiences require students to apply knowledge in dynamic, real-world environments. Across programs, students develop adaptable skills that prepare them to respond effectively to evolving professional and industry contexts.
- **National College of Education (NCE):** NCE embeds intellectual inquiry through research-informed practice, reflective analysis, and applied scholarship aligned with professional standards and licensure requirements. Candidates engage in systematic inquiry through action research projects, data-driven instructional design, and analysis of student learning outcomes in authentic educational settings. At the master's level, programs include applied research components that require candidates to investigate

problems of practice, analyze student performance data, and propose evidence-based instructional interventions. Doctoral programs follow NCE's Doctoral Program Philosophy and Conceptual Framework and follow checklists to culminate in the completion of an original dissertation that advances knowledge in educational leadership, policy, or practice through rigorous research design, data collection, analysis, and scholarly defense.

- **Undergraduate College (UGC):** NLU's Undergraduate College promotes intellectual inquiry through a structured general education foundation and discipline-specific inquiry-based learning experiences. The General Education curriculum cultivates critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, written and oral communication, ethical analysis, and civic engagement, ensuring students develop transferable intellectual skills applicable across professions and communities. Within the majors, students engage in applied and project-based inquiry aligned with disciplinary expectations. For example, in BUS 499, students participate in strategic business simulations and data-driven decision-making exercises; in COM 499, students produce and publicly present original professional portfolios grounded in audience analysis and media theory; and in HUM 490, students complete individualized research projects requiring sustained investigation, synthesis of scholarly sources, and formal presentation of findings. Students across disciplines also share research and applied projects at the annual Undergraduate Research Symposium, reinforcing scholarly communication and peer engagement.

NLU faculty are actively engaged in disciplinary scholarship and the scholarship of teaching and learning, with outputs tracked by the Provost's Office and reported on yearly in the NLU Scholarship Annual Report. Faculty also serve as subject-matter experts in collaboration with LXD to ensure that the curriculum design reflects current disciplinary standards and Quality Matters expectations, reinforcing institutional accountability for academic rigor.

Through intentionally designed curricula, aligned learning outcomes, applied learning experiences, and robust instructional and academic support structures, NLU ensures that intellectual inquiry is integral to all educational programs, demonstrating NLU's systematic and mission-aligned approach to preparing graduates with the critical thinking, problem-solving, and inquiry skills essential for lifelong learning, responsible citizenship, and professional success.

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### 3.C. Sufficiency of Faculty and Staff

The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services.

#### Argument

NLU employs a sufficient number of qualified faculty and staff to support high-quality academic programs, student services, and institutional effectiveness. Faculty and staffing needs are reviewed annually through institutional budgeting and planning processes, with additional consideration given to specialized accreditation requirements where applicable. The university recognizes that effective hiring, credentialing, onboarding, evaluation, and professional development are essential to sustaining academic quality and student success. These practices ensure students have consistent access to qualified instructors, timely advising, and well-supported academic operations across locations and modalities.

#### Faculty Policies Supporting Sufficiency, Quality, and Sustainability

NLU ensures the sufficiency and effectiveness of its faculty through clearly articulated policies that define workload expectations (Faculty Policy (FP) 102 - Full-time Faculty Workload), performance standards (FP103 - Faculty Performance Evaluation), and pathways for advancement (FP104 - Awarding Promotion, Tenure, and Multi-year Appointments). These policies establish consistent, transparent expectations across faculty roles, enabling the institution to deploy faculty capacity effectively while supporting high-quality teaching, scholarship, and student support services.

FP102 delineates expectations for teaching, service, and thought leadership, providing a common framework for allocating effort and managing faculty responsibilities across academic terms and faculty tracks. By clearly defining instructional load, service commitments, and scholarly expectations, the workload policy supports equitable distribution of responsibilities, guards against overextension, and ensures that faculty have the capacity to engage meaningfully in teaching, advising, curriculum development, and community- and career-aligned activities that support student success.

FP103, discussed above in 1.C., guides the evaluation of faculty performance. Faculty are evaluated through a structured Faculty Performance Evaluation (FPE) process that applies to all full-time faculty across tenure, professional practice, and teaching tracks. The FPE framework evaluates performance across the domains of Teaching, Service, and Thought Leadership, with expectations calibrated to faculty role and track (domains described in 1.B.). This system provides regular feedback, reinforces instructional quality, and ensures accountability to institutional standards, while also identifying areas for professional growth and support. To support consistent implementation of the FPE process at scale and reduce the administrative burden on faculty, NLU developed a homegrown digital FPE tool in partnership with Learning and Information Technology Services (LITS) and launched it for the 2026 cycle. The system streamlines the evaluation process by auto-populating courses taught and prior goals, replacing manual SharePoint workflows with guided, system-

generated prompts that align goal-setting with FPE and promotion criteria while providing real-time visibility into process status. Collectively, this tool improves clarity, efficiency, and faculty experience while strengthening institutional capacity to manage performance evaluation in a sustainable and equitable manner

FP104 further reinforces faculty sufficiency by establishing clear, differentiated criteria for advancement aligned with the University's mission and academic priorities. Tenure and professional practice faculty are evaluated on sustained contributions to teaching effectiveness, scholarly or applied thought leadership, and service to the institution and broader community, while teaching-track faculty advancement emphasizes instructional excellence and student learning. These transparent standards support faculty retention, professional development, and long-term institutional capacity by ensuring that advancement decisions are consistent, mission-aligned, and grounded in evidence of high-quality performance.

Collectively, NLU's workload, evaluation, and promotion policies create a coherent faculty framework that supports instructional quality, responsible scholarship, and sustainable faculty engagement. By clarifying expectations and aligning faculty roles with institutional needs, these policies ensure that NLU maintains the faculty capacity necessary to deliver effective academic programs and student services across its diverse learning environments.

## **Faculty Qualifications and Development**

NLU employs qualified faculty whose credentials and professional experience meet or exceed institutional and accreditor expectations. Each college and academic unit (Accelerate U, CPBS, GSBL, Kendall, NCE, and UGC) maintains a faculty credentialing matrix that defines minimum qualifications and acceptable tested experience for teaching. The institution has a Faculty Hiring and Credentialing web page with faculty orientation materials, and the Provost's Office and Human Resources (HR) have a credentialing process for university personnel to follow in credentialing new hires. Once a faculty member is hired, they send official transcripts for their degrees to HR. Those are then saved in their employee and credentialing files, and their degree information is entered into Banner. In cases where tested experience is used in lieu of a credential, the College Dean must sign off and provide justification.

Faculty onboarding and ongoing development are supported by the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE). New faculty receive structured orientation materials, including contracts, workload expectations, teaching resources, and institutional contacts. CTLE provides ongoing support through professional development workshops, instructional resources, course management guidance, research support, and regular communication, ensuring faculty are prepared to teach effectively across modalities.

Each full-time faculty member has access to \$1,000 to fund annual professional development activities; in 2024-2025, 37 faculty used \$44,407 in funds. Furthermore, beginning in AY 2024-25, a supplemental Thought Leadership Dissemination Fund was introduced to support faculty participation in regional, national, and international scholarly venues. This initiative highlights NLU's commitment to increasing the global visibility of faculty research and contributions and to supporting their ability to present and publish their work on prominent platforms. This funding allows faculty to attend conferences, workshops, and other events that enhance their teaching, research, and engagement in their fields. This

financial support reflects NLU's dedication to helping faculty remain current and active in their respective disciplines.

## **Qualified and Trained Operational Staff**

NLU employs qualified staff to support academic operations, student services, and institutional functions. Job descriptions (such as for full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, full-time staff, and part-time staff) clearly define minimum qualifications, and hiring processes include structured screening and guidance from search committees to ensure compliance with position requirements.

Staff onboarding includes institutional new-hire orientation and access to ongoing professional development opportunities aligned with departmental goals and the university's strategic priorities. In 2024, NLU implemented Acorn, its centralized employee learning and resource platform, which supports consistent onboarding, professional growth, and institutional accountability. Acorn houses a comprehensive course catalog of professional development videos and articles, an employee resource hub that centralizes key policies and tools, and institution-wide surveys, including staff performance appraisals, 30/60/90-day check-ins, and exit surveys. Complementing this, the annual fall Connections event provides institution-wide professional learning and cross-department engagement with recent sessions focusing on topics such as artificial intelligence, enrollment trends, technology modernization, and NLU's institutional history and role in Chicago.

As the institution has grown, staffing in key support areas has increased. Between 2021 and 2024, operational staff increased from 488 to 564 positions with additions in Enrollment, Advising and Learning Support, Career Bridge, and Florida Operations. In response to enrollment growth, NLU Florida hired its first Student Affairs Coordinator.

Administrators, faculty, and staff also participate in professional organizations and conferences to stay connected and contribute to industry communities. NLU's Provost is a Trustee for Adler University and on the Board of Directors for the Youth Job Center, the Senior Vice President of Finance and Financial Services is on the Board of the Central Association of College and University Business Officers (CACUBO), while the Dean of CPBS serves as President of the National Council of Schools and Programs of Professional Psychology (NCSP), and the Program Director of Clinical Psychology serves on the American Psychological Association's (APA) Commission on Accreditation. In addition, the NLU accreditation team attends the Higher Learning Commission conference each year and encourages NLU faculty and staff to do the same.

Student Affairs staff at NLU participate in a range of required and encouraged trainings that support compliance, student safety, and effective service delivery. In accordance with the Illinois Preventing Sexual Violence in Higher Education Act (ILPSVHE), all employees complete annual Title IX training to ensure awareness of reporting responsibilities, prevention strategies, and institutional response protocols. Additionally, role-specific training is required for Title IX Coordinators, investigators, and hearing board members, with training coordinated through external partners such as ATIXA and the Chicagoland Title IX Consortium. Staff in academic advising, library services, student success, and academic support roles are appropriately credentialed and participate in ongoing training, such as programming from the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. Employees are also encouraged to complete FERPA training to support appropriate

handling of student records, while designated staff complete Clery Act and HOUSE Liaison training to ensure compliance with campus safety and student housing support requirements.

NLU incorporates employee feedback through instruments such as the Noel-Levitz Employee Satisfaction Survey to inform institutional planning and improvement efforts. Survey results are used to guide initiatives related to employee engagement and workplace effectiveness. NLU continues to expand professional development opportunities, including the relaunch of Mental Health First Aid training and ongoing ADA-focused training provided by the Center for Student Accessibility Resources. Together, these efforts ensure that staff are equipped to support students effectively while maintaining compliance with federal and state regulations.

Departments also organize unit-level retreats and workshops that strengthen alignment and operational effectiveness. Additionally, in 2023-2024, NLU's President formed a Director Strategy Forum to facilitate communication among director-level leaders and to incorporate their insights and ideas into our strategic plan.

### **Faculty and Staffing Across the Colleges**

NLU ensures sufficient faculty and staffing aligned with the needs of the colleges and accreditor expectations. Examples of faculty and staffing sufficiency and actions taken to maintain sufficiency across the colleges include the following:

- **College of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences (CPBS):** In CPBS, the Dean's Office is supported by an Academic Operations Manager and an Academic Administrative Assistant; the latter also supports the MS Counseling Program in IL at 50%, as required by its accrediting body (CACREP). The MS Counseling and CES programs in FL also have a full-time dedicated support professional. To ensure faculty sufficiency and maintain appropriate faculty-to-student ratios in the FL Counseling programs, CPBS hired four new full-time faculty in July 2025. Each of the two Clinical Psychology PsyD programs has dedicated full-time administrative support. CPBS is currently hiring faculty for the Applied Behavioral Analysis and Illinois PsyD programs.
- **Graduate School of Business and Leadership (GSBL):** GSBL employs six full-time faculty members. Several GSBL programs hold specialized accreditation from the International Accreditation Council for Business Education (IACBE), which sets additional expectations for faculty qualifications, sufficiency, and academic oversight. As enrollment nearly doubled from 320 students in AY 2022–2023 to 596 students in AY 2023–2024, staffing levels and administrative support structures have been adjusted to maintain instructional quality and compliance with accreditor expectations. In response to these positive enrollment trends, two additional administrative faculty roles have been funded: one supporting the HRMD and DBA programs, effective April 1, 2024, and a second supporting the MBA program, effective July 1, 2024.
- **Kendall College:** All Chef-instructors meet the American Culinary Federation (ACF) qualifications for post-secondary programs, and 82% have at least an Associate's Degree in their discipline, with many also holding related bachelor's or master's degrees. Among full-time faculty, educational credentials range from high school diplomas with the appropriate certifications to master's degrees. Consistent with disciplinary norms in culinary education, extensive industry experience is a key factor in instructional qualifications. Kendall College encourages faculty to continue their

education and obtain advanced degrees to support instructional excellence and professional growth.

- **National College of Education (NCE):** Faculty and staff within NCE are intentionally aligned with disciplinary expectations and external accreditor and regulatory standards. NCE programs are reviewed through multiple oversight bodies, including the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) for the School Psychology program, and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). Faculty are recruited and credentialed to meet or exceed these standards, with careful attention to instructional expertise, clinical preparation, licensure/certifications, and professional practice in education settings. Staffing levels are monitored to ensure compliance with accreditor requirements, including the NASP-mandated 12:1 student-to-faculty ratio in School Psychology, while faculty ratios in other NCE programs are guided by institutional policy and programmatic needs.
- **Undergraduate College (UGC):** The UGC maintains hiring, onboarding, and staffing practices that align with NLU's mission and values while also meeting enrollment needs and accreditor expectations. Several UGC programs are subject to specialized accreditation standards, including those of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the International Accreditation Council for Business Education (IACBE), the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), and the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE, pending), which establish additional requirements related to faculty qualifications, sufficiency, and instructional oversight. To ensure compliance, all faculty credentials—including academic preparation, professional experience, and tested experience—are verified and aligned with the UGC Credentialing Matrix.

### **Sufficiency of Staffing in Non-Academic Areas**

NLU ensures efficient and effective staffing in non-academic areas through a structured, data-informed approach to workforce planning, position management, and ongoing assessment. Administrative and support staffing levels are aligned with institutional mission, strategic priorities, and operational needs to ensure that services are delivered effectively without unnecessary duplication or inefficiency.

Staffing decisions for non-academic units are guided by established position review and approval processes that evaluate operational need, scope of responsibilities, and alignment with institutional goals. Requests for new positions or changes to existing roles undergo cross-functional review, typically involving divisional leadership, human resources, finance, and senior administration, to ensure consistency, fiscal responsibility, and appropriate allocation of resources.

The institution regularly monitors staffing efficiency through budget analysis, workload assessments, service demand trends, and benchmarking against peer and aspirational institutions where appropriate. In addition, the institution promotes efficiency through role clarity, process improvement, and strategic use of technology. Periodic reviews of organizational structures and workflows help identify opportunities to streamline operations, reassign responsibilities, or leverage automation and shared services. Professional development and cross-training further support staffing flexibility and continuity, reducing reliance on additional hires while maintaining service quality. Through these coordinated practices, the institution demonstrates responsible stewardship of human resources in

non-academic areas to support student success and university operations.

## **A Culture of Continuous Improvement**

NLU fosters a culture of continuous improvement through ongoing professional development and leadership opportunities. Human Resources and Staff Council collaborate to offer additional professional development opportunities as well. Faculty and staff development is supported through multiple structures, including:

- **Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE)**: Central to faculty professional development is the CTLE, which provides institution-wide support for instructional quality, pedagogical innovation, and equity-minded teaching. The CTLE ensures that faculty across appointment types have access to structured development opportunities that strengthen teaching effectiveness, support student learning, and sustain high-quality academic programs. The CTLE is discussed further in 3.D.
- **Acorn Course Catalog**: This online catalog, open to all NLU employees, details the extensive professional development offerings available through NLU's Learning Management System (LMS), providing faculty and staff with self-paced learning modules, instructional resources, and skill-building courses tailored to their professional needs.
- **Professional Development Webinars**: NLU offers employees a series of webinars covering a wide range of topics, from leadership and communication to DEI initiatives and student engagement strategies.
- **Student Worker Management Course**: This course supports employees who hire and manage student workers by providing training on best practices in recruitment, supervision, and mentorship. Equipping staff with these skills fosters an environment where student employees receive meaningful professional experiences.
- **Emerging Leaders Program**: This sixteen-week program is open to all employees interested in developing their leadership skills, regardless of current role or managerial aspirations. Participants gain valuable insights into leadership principles, institutional operations, and career growth strategies. Completion of the program confers credit for prior learning, reinforcing NLU's commitment to career advancement and professional development.
- **Director's Strategy Forum**: This forum is designed to provide director-level leaders with an opportunity to engage with strategic issues that will define NLU's direction, in collaboration with the President's Executive Cabinet. The forum also provides space for building a greater sense of community and communication across all levels of leadership at NLU and offers additional opportunities for leadership development.
- **Staff Mentorship Program**: This program is a six-month commitment, during which time staff mentors or mentees meet monthly to discuss professional goals and share insights, advice, and resources. New cohorts launch at the start of each term.
- **Momentum Accountability Program**: This is a pilot program, started by Staff Council, to encourage staff to set goals and work with a small cohort to help each other achieve them.

NLU's commitment to faculty and staff sufficiency and effectiveness is further evidenced through institutional tools and processes such as exit interview data (used to identify trends and areas for improvement), new hire orientation resources, cohort-based onboarding for new staff and full-time faculty, leadership training for managers (Leadership Academy), manager toolkits, and formal performance evaluation policies and processes for both staff

and faculty. For faculty, performance evaluation processes are complemented by targeted development resources, such as CTLE programming and mentoring, to ensure expectations are supported by opportunities for growth, reinforcing both accountability and sustainability of faculty capacity. Faculty and staff development pathways at NLU are intentionally differentiated to reflect distinct roles while remaining aligned to shared institutional priorities for student success.

Through intentional hiring practices, documented credentialing processes, structured onboarding, ongoing professional development, and regular evaluation, NLU ensures that it maintains sufficient, qualified faculty and staff to support high-quality academic programs and student services. These integrated systems strengthen institutional capacity and support student success by ensuring that faculty and staff are well-prepared, appropriately supported, and sustainably deployed to meet instructional, advising, and programmatic needs.

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### **3.D. Support for Student Learning and Resources for Teaching**

The institution provides student support services that address the needs of its student populations, as well as the teaching resources and infrastructure necessary for student success.

#### **Argument**

NLU supports student learning through an integrated network of academic, co-curricular, and technological resources designed to meet the needs of its diverse student populations. Consistent with its mission to inspire and empower learners, NLU ensures that students receive comprehensive academic support while faculty are equipped with the resources, professional development, and infrastructure necessary to deliver high-quality instruction across modalities.

Student learning at NLU is supported not only in the classroom but at every point of student interaction. Academic Advising, Learning Support, Career Bridge, accessibility services, technology infrastructure, and basic needs support collectively create a holistic ecosystem that promotes persistence, achievement, and timely degree completion. This integrated approach ensures that students receive timely, coordinated interventions rather than fragmented or duplicative services.

Providing high-quality post-secondary educational opportunities requires deep pedagogy and a robust community of scholarship. NLU cultivates teaching excellence and academic innovation through a number of mechanisms throughout the university. Faculty take advantage of a significant number of professional development opportunities on the craft of teaching while also being encouraged and celebrated for scholarly work in their fields.

Given NLU's highly diverse student population, including working adults, first-generation students, and learners enrolled across multiple modalities, student support services and teaching resources are intentionally designed to be flexible, accessible, and equitable. Services are delivered in-person and virtually, ensuring students have consistent access regardless of campus location or modality. To this end, NLU provides a comprehensive, coordinated system of support services to address both academic and non-academic needs, as detailed here.

#### **Academic Advising & Student Success Coaching**

Academic Advising at NLU employs a holistic, proactive model that connects students to academic planning, institutional resources, and graduation pathways. Undergraduate students are supported by a combination of success coaches and academic advisors, while graduate students work with academic advisors. Services are delivered across modalities to support students regardless of campus or instructional format. First-time freshman students in the Undergraduate College are assisted by student success coaches, and transfer students are supported by Academic Advisors. Both teams support students with the

transition to NLU, course registration, degree planning, and progress, and connect students with university resources.

Annually, advisors facilitate nearly 16,000 student appointments, resolving more than 9,000 cases of academic performance, and sending over 1,000,000 student communications. Advisors empower students on their educational journeys through personalized collaboration and close monitoring of academic performance.

All advising and coaching staff have access to NLU's AI-powered platform, Eagle Retain, which aggregates and analyzes data from key internal systems, ensuring that all relevant student information is available in one place, so that student-facing staff can gain a holistic view of each student's performance, identify that student's challenges, and provide personalized follow-up. These systems include data from Banner (an Enterprise Resource Planning system), Degree Works (a degree-tracking system), and Brightspace by D2L, NLU's Learning Management System (LMS). Previously, NLU staff had to navigate several windows and systems to gain a full understanding of a student's journey at NLU. By consolidating information from these disparate sources, student support staff and faculty can provide a unified, near-real-time dashboard that offers NLU faculty and staff actionable insights into student performance and engagement. Importantly, the efficiencies achieved through Eagle Retain will free up staff time to provide more personalized, direct outreach to students.

Eagle Retain has been developed with direct input from faculty and staff to ensure it effectively meets the needs of both educators and students. At its core, the platform employs AI-driven predictive analytics to identify students who may require additional support:

- *Predictive Flags* are triggered by various academic indicators, including GPA trends, course engagement levels, failed courses, and weekly academic performance. These flags provide early warnings, allowing faculty and advisors to step in before a student's academic struggles become unmanageable.
- The *AI Retention Score* provides a broader assessment of each student's overall standing by evaluating factors such as academic performance, course load, withdrawal history, and real-time engagement with coursework. By having AI analyze these elements, the system can generate a comprehensive risk assessment that helps advisors tailor their support strategies to individual students.

By using AI to analyze these critical data points, faculty and staff can take a more proactive approach to student support. Rather than waiting for a student to seek help, which many at-risk students may hesitate to do, the platform alerts staff to potential issues in advance, through push notifications and other alerts. This allows for timely interventions, such as academic coaching, tutoring recommendations, or adjustments to course loads, before problems escalate. Ultimately, the Eagle Retain automation, driven by AI, will help advisors prioritize their student caseloads, drive efficiencies, and enable them to work with and support more students.

Additionally, Eagle Retain includes built-in communication and case management tools. Faculty and advisors can reach out to students directly via email or text, ensuring seamless, efficient communication. The case management features also enable cross-functional collaboration between faculty, advisors, and student support teams, fostering a coordinated approach to student success.

## **Career Bridge**

Through NLU's Career Bridge department, all students are assigned a Career Advisor in their first term who supports them throughout their academic journey to promote career readiness and successful employment upon graduation. Employer Relations Managers identify and cultivate partnerships with organizations to connect students with meaningful internship and employment opportunities.

Career Bridge intentionally collaborates with faculty and academic leadership to embed career development within the curriculum rather than treating it as a separate service. Career milestones, including résumé and portfolio development, professional branding, internship preparation, and job search strategies, are integrated into coursework through applied learning experiences such as internships, fieldwork, service learning, and capstone projects. This structured alignment ensures that career preparation reinforces academic learning outcomes and strengthens students' transition from education to employment.

In partnership with Academic Advisors and Success Coaches, Career Advisors provide coordinated, milestone-based support from first-year through graduation and into post-graduate employment search. This integrated model ensures that career development is sustained, intentional, and embedded across the student lifecycle.

## **Center for Student Accessibility Resources**

The Center for Student Accessibility Resources (CSAR) ensures that all aspects of the student experience are accessible by providing reasonable accommodations, such as exam accommodations, audio recording in the classroom, note-taking assistance, and alternative textbook formats. These services are available across all program options. Students receive CSAR information during orientation, including how to request academic accommodations. Faculty and staff are invited to attend an annual training on accommodations hosted by CSAR, and a recording is made available for access throughout the year.

In addition to individual accommodations, NLU promotes universal design principles in teaching and course design to proactively reduce barriers to learning. Faculty are supported through CTLE, Learning Design, and CSAR collaboration to design accessible course materials, assessments, and learning activities, reinforcing inclusive teaching practices that benefit all students.

## **International Student & Scholar Services**

International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) provides comprehensive guidance for international students throughout the student lifecycle, including visa interview preparation, pre-departure information, orientations, on-campus employment, internships, post-graduate employment, health insurance, and acculturation to life in the U.S. ISSS also collaborates closely with academic advising and scheduling to ensure international students are enrolled in the appropriate credit load each term and that academic planning aligns with federal visa requirements.

To support retention and academic support, ISSS launched an International Success Community series featuring monthly workshops focused on acculturation, academic expectations, and campus engagement. Cultural celebrations, such as the Lunar New Year event and the Ramadan exhibition, further provide recognition and a sense of belonging for

the international student community. In addition, ISSS has expanded staff and faculty training to strengthen institutional knowledge of visa regulations and effective practices for supporting international student success.

## **Learning and Information Technology Services**

Learning and Information Technology Services (LITS) enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of the university's academic and administrative processes, including recruiting, admissions, registration, financial aid, student accounts, finance, human resources, and alumni development. LITS also facilitates the effective use of technology in teaching, learning, and advising by ensuring reliable access to systems, instructional tools, and data that support student success.

To provide timely, consistent support to students, faculty, and staff, NLU partners with Ellucian's Central Help Desk (CHD), a higher-education–focused service that provides 24/7/365 technical assistance. The CHD handles approximately 4,000–5,000 support requests annually and resolves 80–90% of issues at first contact, ensuring minimal disruption to instructional and administrative activities. Monthly service-level reports are reviewed by NLU to monitor performance and responsiveness and to identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

Through these practices, LITS improves administrative decision-making by enabling access to accurate, timely data; supports faculty and staff in delivering instruction and services; and ensures students have dependable, global access to the technologies required to engage fully in their academic programs. LITS's work aligns with the university's strategic plan, institutional technology governance structures, and established technology policies and procedures.

## **Learning Management System - Brightspace by D2L**

NLU has utilized D2L's Brightspace platform (referred to on campus as "D2L") since Winter 2012, making NLU one of the platform's first adopters. Since then, the institution has tested and incorporated a number of D2L changes, and today, D2L is one of the cornerstones of program delivery at NLU. Students engage with their courses through online and mobile versions of D2L to access syllabi, course resources, schedules, modules, and other information.

## **Learning Support**

Learning Support provides structured tutoring and academic skill development in writing, math, computer science, and English-language learning. Services are available across campuses and modalities, including embedded academic support within targeted courses.

In AY 2025, Learning Support recorded 4,873 student appointments, with 456 instances in which students improved from failing to passing grades after using services. Students earning a B or lower increased their grades by an average of 1.64 grade points. Additional supports include institution-wide access to Grammarly Premium and Tutor.com, reinforcing equitable academic assistance outside of Learning Support's operating hours.

## **Library**

Learning resources include access to physical and digital library collections, research databases, and software tools. D2L is used consistently across programs, and faculty are trained to create engaging, accessible, and equitable learning environments.

The University Library serves all students, staff, and faculty by providing research support and instruction in information literacy, including evaluating, integrating, and ethically using information. The library also provides access to high-quality resources, asynchronous learning materials, and contributes to the critical and intellectual inquiry of students, educators, and researchers through engaged teaching and scholarship. All resources are available to all students, regardless of their campus location. The library partners with Learning Design and the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence to create and embed high-quality learning materials into new and revised curricula, and to provide faculty workshops on effectively integrating research skills and academic integrity into courses, using AI ethically, and related topics.

Through its collaboration with CTLE and Learning Design, the University Library functions as a core component of NLU's instructional infrastructure (as discussed in 3.A.). These partnerships ensure that faculty have access to high-quality learning materials, research-integrated assignments, and instructional support that directly enhances student learning outcomes.

## **New Student Orientation**

NLU welcomes new students through coordinated onboarding experiences designed to ensure a confident and successful start. Led by Student Onboarding, Achievement, and Relationships (SOAR), first-year students attend a mandatory in-person First-Year Orientation, while transfer and graduate students participate in the Graduate & Transfer Welcome Breakfast. These sessions introduce students to academic and co-curricular resources, review the Student Handbook and Code of Conduct, provide campus tours, and guide students through essential systems such as the NLU Portal and the learning management system (D2L).

Students receive orientation materials that include a resource guide, onboarding checklist, and welcome messages from the President and Provost. In addition, NLUReady ([ready.nl.edu](https://ready.nl.edu)) serves as a centralized digital orientation hub, offering step-by-step guidance on registration, student finance, academic support services, and campus resources. Together, these in-person and digital experiences provide students with a structured foundation for navigating university systems and engaging fully in their academic journey.

## **Office of the Registrar**

The Office of the Registrar at NLU provides essential services that support students throughout their academic journey.

- **Academic Services** provides students with important resources, including academic calendars, comprehensive course catalogs dating back to 1890, and course schedules for planning. Students can also access information about academic review standards and dismissal appeal processes.
- **Degrees and Diplomas** handles all aspects of degree completion, including graduation applications, completion statements, diploma distribution, and diploma replacements. These services ensure timely degree conferral and documentation.

- **FERPA Compliance** safeguards student privacy through information release authorizations, formal hearing requests, and the management of directory information disclosure. These measures protect educational records while allowing appropriate access.
- **Licensure Support** assists education students in navigating the process of obtaining Professional Educator Licenses and endorsements, providing clear instructions and guidance.
- **Transcript Services** facilitates the request and distribution of official academic records, with comprehensive information about the process and frequently asked questions.
- **Transfer Articulation** offers extensive resources for incoming students, including foreign credential evaluation, degree planning tools, program change procedures, and various credit evaluation services, including prior learning assessment.
- **Verification Services** manages requests for enrollment verification, education certification, changes to personal information, gender marker and pronoun updates, loan deferments, leaves of absence, and special letters. These services authenticate student status and information for various external purposes.

All of these services demonstrate NLU's commitment to supporting student success by efficiently administering academic records and policies.

### **Office of Wellness Services**

NLU's Office of Wellness Services strives to help students learn the skills to cope with the stresses of change and growth, so they are better able to learn and thrive after their time as students is over. They do this through a number of avenues available to students: drop-in counseling services with NLU staff, mental health and coping resources, connection to the Thrive Center and Food Pantry, fitness and nutrition information, substance abuse information, connection to SNAP benefits, and other resources. NLU's mental health services, available online and in person at the Chicago and Wheeling campuses, are provided through third-party partners Uwill and Skylight. Since the start of the Fall 2025 semester, 450 students received clinical mental health services through these contracted service providers. NLU endeavors to ensure that each student has the holistic resources they need to succeed in their education and careers.

### **Student Organizations**

NLU has a variety of organizations to appeal to nearly every interest. NLU has many student-led organizations within the areas of culture, sports and recreation, academic, social, service, performance, spiritual/religious, and Greek life. NLU's student organizations provide opportunities for students to grow as leaders, engage in professional development, explore diverse cultural experiences, and pursue a range of non-academic interests.

A list of active student organizations in Academic Year 25-26 includes the following:

- Alpha Alpha Alpha (First-Gen Honor Society)
- Alpha Lambda Delta (First-Year Student Honor Society)
- Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc
- Association of Latino Professionals for America (ALPFA)

- Black Student Union
- Global Exchange
- Graduate International Organization
- National Louis Social Work Club
- National Louis University Counseling Association
- NLU Business Club
- NLU Fitness Club
- NLU Sales Club
- P.U.R.P.L.E. Panthers (Sigma Lambda Gamma Sorority Interest group)
- School Psychology Organization
- Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.
- Tau Sigma (Transfer Student Honor Society)
- USEED
- Wheeling Computer Science Club

### **Thrive Center and Food Pantry**

NLU addresses students' basic needs through the NLU Thrive Center and Food Pantry. As discussed above in 1.B., the Thrive Center is a resource hub that connects students to a range of services, including food, housing, childcare, employment, and financial literacy resources. The Thrive Center combats food insecurity through the NLU Food Pantry, supported by the Greater Chicago Food Depository, and provides students with access to fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, and other items. The Thrive Center's resources are available online and through the Single Stop app, reinforcing the university's commitment to student persistence, well-being, and accessibility.

### **Resources for Teaching and Faculty Support**

NLU maintains a robust infrastructure to support both teaching excellence and student learning. The Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE) provides training in pedagogy, instructional design, and building community. These resources ensure that faculty are equipped to meet the learning needs of NLU's diverse student population and to support student success across modalities and disciplines. The CTLE offers a wide range of workshops and programs that align with NLU's Teaching Excellence Framework, created by a faculty task force in AY 2020-21 and revised and updated in 2024-25. This framework outlines the core competencies that faculty members must develop to ensure teaching excellence, including the Subject Matter Guide category, which emphasizes remaining current in one's field:

- Supporting students in acquiring professional knowledge and skills within their discipline.
- Guiding students into a deep, evolving understanding of subject matter.
- Modeling discipline-specific problem-solving and professional practice.
- Utilizing research and tools specific to their discipline in teaching.

There are two other domains of Teaching Excellence: Designer & Teacher and Community Building. The CTLE maintains resources on its website to explain the components of the Teaching Excellence Framework.

The CTLE offers professional development opportunities aligned with the Teaching

Excellence Framework as well as other opportunities, including onboarding support, teaching practice, technology use, data-informed instruction, and equity in teaching. To ensure a strong start in their teaching roles, every faculty member is required to complete the college-level onboarding program and can also participate in the “Jump Start” onboarding program offered through CTLE to provide new faculty with foundational knowledge as they begin teaching. All new faculty teaching online are also required to complete the “Excellence in Online and Remote Teaching” course. NLU’s instructional support infrastructure is designed to ensure consistency and quality across face-to-face, hybrid, and fully online courses.

During an NLU instructor’s first term of teaching, a developmental classroom observation is conducted. Each new faculty member meets with the observer to discuss strengths and areas for improvement in teaching practice, student engagement in learning, and the incorporation of industry knowledge. Resources are provided as needed, and a follow-up observation or discussion may be scheduled. In addition to initial developmental observations, colleges use end-of-course student feedback collected through IDEA course evaluations as an indicator of instructional support and for follow-up observations. Faculty whose IDEA results fall below established thresholds receive additional observation, feedback, and targeted professional development to support instructional improvement. These observations and supports are grounded in the University’s Teaching Excellence Framework, which provides a shared set of concrete teaching practices and expectations that guide feedback, reflection, and continuous improvement. Additionally, faculty are encouraged to participate in CTLE workshops and attend external workshops, while full-time faculty often reflect on their professional development experiences in the Faculty Performance Evaluation (FPE). Over the last three academic years, the CTLE has supported full-time and adjunct faculty participation in TeachX, an annual local conference hosted by Northwestern University that showcases innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

### **Continuous Student Feedback & Improvement**

NLU has several mechanisms to solicit student feedback to improve learning experiences. These efforts inform the development of student support services, inclusive learning environments, and co-curricular programming.

- **IDEA Course Survey**: Continuously collecting informal feedback plays an important role in faculty and students co-creating their learning environment. When students complete a course at NLU, they can provide formal feedback on the course and their instructor using IDEA Surveys by Campus Labs. IDEA survey data initiates improvements across the university. In CPBS in 2025, a desire to increase student satisfaction among new faculty led to the implementation of a coaching-through-mentorship model, including pairing new faculty in offices with established faculty, which reduced student complaints and increased new faculty retention. In 2025, the Florida campus responded to its overall IDEA teaching scores being lower than the NLU average by having programs revise their orientations and program handbooks to better set students up for success. IDEA Course survey data is interrogated during the quarterly portfolio health dialogues with the Academic Cabinet to present them in context with other key metrics.
- **Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey**: NLU conducts the Noel-Levitz survey biennially to assess student satisfaction, with results disseminated to leadership,

colleges, and faculty. Three surveys are conducted: SSI (intended for campus-based, traditional learners), ASPS (intended for campus-based adults), and PSOL (intended for online learners). Noel-Levitz survey results have informed a number of improvements throughout the colleges. In NCE in 2025, based on student feedback, elementary education faculty reduced course content loads to improve instructional quality, while secondary education faculty worked to build instructional and assessment consistency across all secondary content areas. At the same time, based on Noel-Levitz Survey Data, Kendall College planned to increase oversight of D2L course shells to identify ways to improve grading timeliness. And in response to survey feedback where students complained of getting the runaround when seeking help, NLU created the One-Stop Student Center on the 2nd floor of the 122 S. Michigan campus. These examples demonstrate how the institution continuously uses survey data to investigate issues and make targeted improvements.

- **Degree Finalization and Graduation Form**: As part of the degree finalization process, graduating students complete a Degree Finalization and Graduation Form. The survey collects feedback on students' academic experience, post-graduation plans, and overall satisfaction. Results inform program improvement and employment rates.
- **Climate Survey**: In academic year 2024–2025, the university administered the Higher Education Data Sharing (HEDS) Campus Climate Survey, which provided institution-wide insights into student experiences both inside and outside the classroom. This data is used to assess the effectiveness of teaching practices, student support structures, and campus climate.
- **BSEEN Survey**: To better understand the lived experiences of Black students, empathy interviews were conducted in AY23 and AY24. These qualitative findings led to the creation of the BSEEN (BE: Scholars Educational Empowerment Narrative) programming, which enhances belonging and engagement for all students at NLU through targeted support and visibility initiatives. Information from this survey led to the opening of the Sankofa Lounge, a center designed to support Black students, as well as tutoring support services in the lounge and programming designed to foster healthy conversations about race.
- **Hope Scholars**: In AY25, empathy interviews were expanded to include Hope Scholars, a population identified as facing unique challenges to persistence. These interviews informed tailored interventions to support academic success and retention.

These feedback mechanisms are not one-time efforts but part of an ongoing strategy that will continue into AY26 and beyond. They ensure that student voices are central to institutional planning and that teaching and learning resources are responsive to evolving student needs.

Together, these academic, co-curricular, and instructional resources function as a coordinated system that supports student learning while equipping faculty with the tools, development, and infrastructure needed for effective teaching. This alignment ensures that student support services and teaching resources mutually reinforce one another in advancing student success.

Through its integrated system of student support services, faculty development, instructional infrastructure, and feedback mechanisms, NLU demonstrates a sustained commitment to supporting student learning and teaching excellence. These coordinated resources ensure that students and faculty are supported across modalities, populations, and programs

—advancing student success and fulfilling the institution's mission.

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### 3.E. Assessment of Student Learning

The institution improves the quality of educational programs based on its assessment of student learning.

#### Argument

NLU enacts a culture of continuous improvement. Innovation, as a core institutional value, propels the university to work to understand and address urgent educational challenges in a diverse and dynamic global era while refusing to be bound by existing structures or traditional thinking. Student learning outcomes assessment serves as a core lever for institutional improvement and innovation by determining how well NLU students are learning what they have set out to achieve.

#### Learning Outcomes Assessment

NLU follows a systematic cycle and process for developing, reviewing, and renewing its outcomes assessment plans. Annually, assessment plans are created, revised, and confirmed for accuracy in early fall by consulting the previous academic year's assessment plans and reports. Assessment planning begins by reviewing program learning outcomes, selecting impactful measures to assess student learning, and setting targets and goals for learning outcome achievement in relation to the measures and resulting data. Once assessment plans are set, data is collected by all colleges and academic units (Accelerate U, CPBS, GSBL, Kendall, NCE, UGC, and the general education sequence) throughout the academic year. At the end of each academic year, assessment reports are populated with collected data, analyzed by program directors, and used to identify action steps based on the results. Templates, resources, and professional development are available online to support the nuanced, customized application of this assessment cycle across the university.

Student learning efforts are evaluated using these academic program plans to assess program learning outcomes (PLOs). PLOs are developed by articulating the core skills and competencies students will learn by the end of the program. These skills are informed by a number of factors, including best practices, employer and market needs, programmatic accreditor requirements, and skills related to mastery of the discipline, and they are then written using best practices, such as using a single, specific measurable action using verbs that the student can demonstrate. PLOs are measured by identifying the key assessment(s) in each program, and even the singular rubric line if possible, where students best demonstrate their learning of that PLO. Usually these are program-developed assessments, but can also be third-party (such as the Peregrine assessments used in the BS in HCL and MHA).

At the end of each academic year, program chairs use Power BI, NLU's data analytics platform, to pull assessment data regarding the number of students who achieved the target on the designated key assessment. By aligning key assessment(s) to each PLO, this system seeks to isolate student performance so that the data maximizes its fidelity in demonstrating how well students learned the skill described in the PLO. After gathering the data,

faculty look at how well students in the program that year achieved the PLO based on their aggregate performance on the key assessment(s) and reflect on any possible programmatic changes (whether curricular, instructional, assessment-related, or otherwise) to make in the coming academic year or years. Assessment data also informs Annual Program Review as one of several Program Health Metrics.

Curriculum maps articulate alignment of learning outcomes to an institutional outcome framework. PLOs have articulated connections to Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) and University Level Outcomes (ULOs). Alignment of PLOs, CLOs, and connections to ULOs are listed in undergraduate and graduate curriculum maps and course planning documents for each college and academic unit (Accelerate U, CPBS, GSBL, Kendall, NCE, and UGC) and university course documents, with PLOs and CLOs communicated to students via course syllabi.

As evidenced above, each academic program submits an annual assessment report documenting progress on learning outcomes, results from signature assessments, and data-informed actions for improvement. The ULOs are assessed through signature assignments and analyzed across colleges. Results from assessment activities inform the Academic Program Review cycle and guide curriculum revisions, faculty development, and resource allocation. Student Affairs is also implementing an assessment plan in 2025-2026 to collect data and demonstrate where learning is happening across different areas of Student Affairs.

### **Examples of Assessment-Informed Improvement**

- **College of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences (CPBS):** The ISPP Clinical Psychology PsyD program conducts an annual, voluntary program review (this is in addition to the required annual assessments for the university). In the program review, faculty examine student outcomes in key competency areas, including the diagnostic and therapy capstones, science capstone exam, dissertation outcomes, and practicum supervisor evaluation feedback. Faculty look for gaps in student outcomes, particularly recurring ones, and make curricular changes that address these gaps. For example, when data showed that students were performing poorly on the psychometrics subtest of PsyD 745, the program revised the course. The faculty who teach this course added weekly quizzes to increase students' likelihood of reading the text, narrowed the teaching focus to the most critical concepts, and updated the final exam to require more application of the content and fewer memorization questions.
- **Graduate School of Business and Leadership (GSBL):** When NLU acquired the Bachelor of Science in Maternal Child Health and the Master of Arts in Human Lactation Studies programs from Union Institute & University in Spring 2024, program leadership conducted a comprehensive curriculum and assessment review in collaboration with the Director of Accreditation and Assessment. This review identified significant gaps in assessment infrastructure, including inconsistent or missing rubrics, assessments focused primarily on program endpoints, and assignments not systematically aligned with program learning outcomes. Rather than collecting assessment data under these conditions, the program implemented proactive, data-informed improvements during the transition year. Faculty developed and implemented standardized rubrics across all courses, revised assignments to ensure clear alignment with program learning outcomes and evolving credentialing

requirements, and established a comprehensive program-level assessment plan for both programs. To support longitudinal measurement of student learning, the undergraduate program aligned key learning outcomes across the entry course (MCH 220) and capstone course (MCH 481), enabling direct assessment of student growth across the curriculum.

- **National College of Education (NCE):** NCE's Annual Assessment Template explicitly requires programs to use assessment data to inform improvement. For each outcome, programs respond to the prompt: *“What might be done to improve program or candidate outcomes in response to these observations?”* The required *Summary and Improving Candidate Outcomes* section further asks programs to synthesize what they learned about candidates’ knowledge and skills and to recommend specific curricular or assessment changes. An illustrative example comes from the MAT in Reading Program’s assessment of the *Reading Research Inquiry: Oral Presentation and Literature Review* assignment in the *Seminar in Reading Research* course, aligned with Program Learning Outcome 1, which focuses on building a strong knowledge base in literacy teaching, learning, and assessment. Faculty identified research synthesis—analyzing patterns across studies rather than summarizing individual articles—as a recurring challenge for some students. In response, faculty implemented scaffolded support over multiple years, including structured Research Review Frameworks and, most recently, an in-class synthesis workshop where instructors modeled synthesis strategies and provided guided practice with individualized support. These changes led to substantial improvement: in 2024, 24% of students scored at the “basic” level, whereas in the most recent cycle, 100% of students demonstrated proficiency, despite a more diverse student cohort. This example demonstrates how assessment results directly informed instructional changes that strengthened learning outcomes while maintaining rigor and advancing equity.
- **Undergraduate College (UGC):** As part of its 2024 IACBE self-study, the Undergraduate Business program identified specific areas for improvement based on assessment results, indicating that targeted student learning outcomes were not consistently met. In response, faculty leaders implemented a series of curriculum revisions designed to strengthen applied learning, communication skills, and discipline-specific competencies. Several core business courses were redeveloped as a result of these findings. BUS 499 Strategic Management, taken at the end of the program by both BSBA and BSM students, was redesigned to include more relevant and applied learning experiences, including a project-based “Stockholder Debrief” in which students present strategic recommendations to a mock governing board, and a business simulation requiring students to make data-informed strategic decisions. These changes reinforce communication and decision-making skills developed earlier in the curriculum. Similar assessment-driven improvements have been implemented in nursing and educator preparation programs, where faculty used outcome data to redesign early clinical experiences and align coursework with licensure expectations.

## University Assessment Council

The University Assessment Council (UAC) provides thought leadership and guidance to support the university’s assessment of student learning. As outlined in the UAC Charter, the council achieves its mission by monitoring processes for continuous improvement and needs awareness; improving implementation of assessment activities and cycles, including

dissemination of findings; collaborating and communicating with stakeholders; promoting data-informed decision-making in response to assessment findings; and providing professional development on assessment practices. The UAC is composed of representatives from across the university, including faculty and staff from each college, the Provost's Office, Learning Design, Student Affairs, Library, Learning Support, and adjuncts.

In recent years, the UAC has built significant infrastructure at the university through surveying, training on assessment best practices, developing an assessment guide, and aligning the UAC's work with the University Curriculum Council (UCC). In academic year 2025-2026, the UAC conducted norming on how to review assessment plans and then performed monthly assessment reviews of the programs being reviewed by UCC in order to give a critical lens to the assessment data to inform comprehensive program reviews. At the same time, the UAC is also considering its own structure to best position itself within the institution and maximize its effectiveness. Through these initiatives, the UAC seeks to bring a collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach to university assessment, using student learning outcomes data to strengthen continuous improvement efforts throughout the institution. Meeting documentation is kept in slide decks and agendas.

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### 3.F. Program Review

The institution improves its curriculum based on periodic program review.

#### Argument

NLU ensures academic consistency and quality across all formats and locations through centralized academic oversight and a common course design framework. All courses, regardless of modality, undergo review to ensure alignment with institutional learning outcomes, accreditation standards, and best practices in instructional design.

Program Review is an integral aspect of continuous improvement at NLU. Every year, each degree-granting program completes an Annual Program Review (APR) template form (UGC uses a college-specific APR form), and every five years on a rotating basis, each program undergoes a Comprehensive Program Review through the University Curriculum Council. Through each of these reviews—both the five-year and annual—programs receive their major health metrics, including enrollment, demographics, graduation rate, graduate employment outcomes, student satisfaction, persistence, program revenue, and program margin. Data for each metric is then compared to university benchmarks and labeled as an Area of Concern, an Area of Competence, or an Area of Excellence, which are reflected on by the program. Other aspects of the program review include curriculum, assessment, community engagement, labor market data, and program goals. This robust process allows for a consistent, thorough investigation of programming with an eye toward continuous improvement and academic rigor.

On a quarterly basis, NLU's Academic Cabinet (discussed in 4.A.) engages in Portfolio Health Dialogues regarding its academic programming. These analyses include a review of enrollment, persistence, and graduate employment outcome data aligned to the APR metrics. These dialogues review program/college outcomes, reflect on areas of strength and opportunity that can inform real-time interventions, offer feedback and clarification on data and methodology, and support a regular practice of data-driven continuous improvement. Insights on data trends and program health inform future reporting to the Board of Trustees Academic Affairs Subcommittee (discussed in 4.A.). These portfolio health dialogues build on the Annual and Five-Year Comprehensive Program Reviews by engaging deans in analyzing key student outcome measures. After analysis, Deans reflect on the data and participate in discussions with their peers and the Provost on achievements and opportunities to inform college-level planning.

Results from the APR process contribute and inform all components of programs, including, but not limited to, curriculum development and enhancement, faculty instructional strategies, program professional development, marketing and enrollment strategies, program admission standards, course prerequisites, resource allocation, and faculty staffing and qualifications. Program leadership and faculty collaborate with the Provost Office and the Strategic Data Center on data collection, analysis, and reporting to ensure assessment plans are executed with fidelity and data is collected. Program leadership and faculty work together to interpret and analyze assessment data while also considering student feedback, industry trends,

advisory board information, and accreditation standards. Through the analysis and review process, annual program and assessment reports are created that articulate implications, program strengths, and opportunities for growth. This analysis then guides the development of goals and the action plan for the year ahead. Where changes may be needed, adjusted outcomes go through appropriate college governance and approval processes, and the impact is reflected in updated program content.

### **Examples of Program Review-Driven Change**

- **College of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences (CPBS):** In the Community Psychology program, several years of APR reports identified that graduating 59% of students within six years of admission was an area for improvement. In response, faculty increased attention to student advising and monitoring progress, particularly for students who were ABD (All But Dissertation) but still interested in completing. These efforts included more regular check-ins and improved tracking of student progress and issues identified through faculty advising. The program implemented a shared online document for advising tracking, allowing faculty advisors to more easily see which students may need additional support in a given quarter. The program has since exceeded the six-year graduation target for the past two years, with a current graduation rate of 65%. The program also saw a notably high number of graduates in 2025 (n = 21) and is focused on sustaining this level of completion moving forward.
- **Graduate School of Business and Leadership (GSBL):** During the 2023–2024 APR for the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program, academic and program leadership closely examined early dissertation progression as the first cohort advanced into the final research phase. Analysis of enrollment trends, course performance, and student progression data—particularly for international students with visa-related progress requirements—identified structural barriers within the dissertation course sequence that increased the risk of delayed completion and course retakes. In response, program leadership collaborated with faculty, dissertation chairs, graduate advising, and compliance stakeholders to implement targeted improvements. These actions included extending the duration of three out of four doctoral research courses (DBA 696, DBA 697, and DBA 698) in which the dissertation is fully drafted, proposed, and defended from the original eight weeks to 16 weeks. Faculty teaching these courses also utilize a continuation grade option to allow students maximum flexibility while drafting. In addition, research courses earlier in the program sequence will be revised to better prepare students for dissertation writing. Together, these data-informed adjustments enhanced flexibility and equity while preserving academic rigor and supporting timely dissertation completion.
- **Kendall College:** After the 2024 program review, the college decided to restructure the placement of general education courses in the AAS programs. This decision was made based on students who were struggling with first-term general education courses and acclimating to college. The college, therefore, developed KCUL 101, Culinary Math, for both associate and bachelor's degree students to better align the math skills they are learning with their future coursework and careers. The results demonstrated that the intervention is working. In Fall 2025, only 8 of 15 students achieved a grade of 70% or above in MTH 101, while 10 out of 11 students achieved a grade of 70% or above in KCUL 101.

- **National College of Education (NCE):** As part of its program review process, faculty in the Teacher Leadership endorsement program systematically analyze student feedback to inform improvement. During a recent review cycle, candidates were asked to identify aspects of the program they would change. A consistent theme emerged regarding misalignment between course workload and assigned credit hours, particularly in applied courses such as *Mentoring and Coaching Fellow Teachers (LDR 523)*. Faculty reviewed this feedback alongside course expectations and determined that revisions were needed to better align credit hours, workload, and learning outcomes. In Spring 2023, four courses were redeveloped: LDR 523 and LDR 531 were increased from 2 to 3 semester hours, while LDR 527 and LDR 511 were reduced to 2 semester hours. Course content and assignments were adjusted accordingly, and credit hour compliance reviews were completed to ensure alignment with institutional and federal standards. Faculty also identified course scheduling as a barrier to completing the required coaching cycle. To address this, LDR 523 was rescheduled to be offered only in the fall and winter terms, providing candidates adequate time to plan and complete applied coaching activities within school calendars. Post-implementation feedback indicates improved alignment between workload and credit expectations and enhanced student learning experiences.
- **Undergraduate College (UGC):** As part of its 23-24 annual program review and 25-26 comprehensive program review with UCC, the Undergraduate College's Social Work program identified enrollment growth as a strategic priority and set a goal to increase enrollment by 25% across first-time freshman, transfer, and online populations. While the program achieved a 21% increase in enrollment in AY24-25 over the prior year, the review process prompted several substantive programmatic and outreach improvements. In response, program leadership strengthened articulation pathways and community partnerships, resulting in new or expanded relationships with multiple community colleges, including Oakton Community College, Harper College, City Colleges of Chicago, Moraine Valley Community College, and the College of Lake County. The program also advanced external partnerships through grant collaborations and advisory roles, including participation as a feeder institution for Kennedy King College's School-Based Mental Health grant and service on the College of Lake County Advisory Board. Internally, Social Work faculty increased collaboration with Enrollment, Transfer Admissions, Career Bridge, Advising, and Online Programming to improve recruitment pipelines, transfer alignment, and career-connected messaging. These actions reflect a systematic use of program review data to refine recruitment strategies, strengthen transfer pathways, and position the program for sustained enrollment growth.

Together, these examples illustrate how NLU uses program review as a structured, data-informed process to strengthen academic quality and student success. Through the integration of Annual Program Reviews, Comprehensive Program Reviews, and quarterly Portfolio Health Dialogues, NLU ensures that academic programs are regularly evaluated using multiple sources of evidence, including student outcomes, faculty insights, industry feedback, and labor market data. These processes engage faculty, program leadership, college leadership, and institutional offices in collaborative reflection and decision-making. As a result, program review serves not only as a mechanism for accountability but also as a catalyst for innovation, curricular refinement, and strategic program development that supports the university's mission and commitment to continuous improvement.

## Sources

- 4.A. Faculty Association Constitution and Bylaws
- 4.A. NLU BOT Academic Affairs Committee Charter
- 4.A. Portfolio Health Measures - 2425 AY Aggregate - ALL Colleges and Groups
- 3.F UGC Annual Program Review Template 2023-2024
- 3.F. 3.G. Academic Cabinet Meeting Example 2.4.2026
- 3.F. 3.G. Sample Portfolio Health Dialogue, AY25Q4
- 3.F. 3.G. Syllabus - Kendall - KCUL 101
- 3.F. 2026 NLU Annual Program Report Template - 2025-26 AY Reporting
- 3.F. Sample Annual Program Review - 2324 - GSBL - Doctor of Business Administration - (DBA)
- 3.F. Sample Annual Program Review - 2324 - Kendall College - AAS in Culinary Arts
- 3.F. Sample Annual Program Review - 2425 - CPBS - PhD in Community Psychology
- 3.F. Sample Annual Program Review - 2425 - GSBL - Doctor of Business Administration (DBA)
- 3.F. Sample Annual Program Review - 2425 - UGC - BA PSY
- 3.F. University Curriculum Committee 2526 Schedule
- 3.G. AY25 Q1-Q4 Portfolio Health Dialogues
- 3.E. UGC APR 2425 - Bachelors in Social Work (BSW)
- 3.F. BSW Five-Year Comprehensive Program Review
- 3.F. UCC 25-26 - Understanding Your Program Health Metrics
- 3.F. UCC Training Overview Slides 25-26
- 3.F. Sample Annual Program Review 2425 MAT in TL

### 3.G. Student Success Outcomes

The institution's student success outcomes demonstrate continuous improvement, taking into account the student populations it serves and benchmarks that reference peer institutions.

#### Argument

Along with assessment data and APR program health metrics, NLU tracks several student success outcomes to support university-wide continuous improvement and to comply with reporting requirements to government agencies and accreditors. For transparency and accountability, NLU regularly publishes information on its Student Achievement Data website, including three years of annual persistence, completion, employment, and default rates. These data are regularly used in strategic planning and decision-making to improve student outcomes.

To ensure clarity, consistency, and accountability in the use of student success data, NLU has established standardized definitions and institution-wide performance targets (to be viewed alongside student achievement data) for its primary outcome measures.

- **Annual persistence data** is calculated based on fall enrollment. A student is counted as persistent if they are still enrolled at NLU or have completed their NLU program by the subsequent fall or winter term. The university has set 80% targets for undergraduate programs and 91% for graduate programs.
- **Term-to-term persistence (retention)** is calculated at the end of each academic term, once enrollment and completion numbers are finalized. A student is counted as retained if they are enrolled from one term to the next or have completed their program.
- **Completion rates** are calculated annually and represent the percentage of a new student cohort that earns a degree within an established time frame appropriate to the credential. NLU's strategic plan sets differentiated targets by degree level, including:
  - 50% four-year completion for undergraduate transfer students
  - 43% completion for Kendall College associate degree programs (three years) and certificate programs (two years)
  - 41% six-year completion for Pathways program (first-time freshman)
  - 73% three-year completion for master's programs
  - 59% six-year completion for doctoral programs
- **Employment outcomes** are defined as a successful placement within 6 months of program completion. NLU has established 90% employment targets for undergraduate programs and 93% for graduate programs, reflecting the institution's focus on career-relevant education and economic mobility. Employment data are collected through the Degree Finalization and Graduation Form (discussed in 3.D.), completed by students at the time of degree conferral. Career Bridge conducts follow-up outreach approximately six months post-graduation for students who did not indicate employment or active career pursuit at graduation.

In addition to the overall targets above, NLU's 2030 Strategic Plan outcomes for persistence and completion rates are further disaggregated by student populations, including first-time freshman, transfer and adult learners, and demographic groups (such as in Slide 14 of the Strategic Plan). This disaggregation enables the university to identify equity gaps, set population-specific benchmarks, and deploy targeted interventions aligned with student needs.

To inform goal-setting across student outcome measures, including persistence, graduation, and employment, NLU uses benchmarking from similar institutions and, where available, independent external evaluation. Benchmarking analyses draw on publicly available IPEDS data. For example, the UGC defines its peer comparison groups for these measures as two-year urban community colleges and broad-access four-year institutions with comparable student body characteristics, defined by similar ratios of Pell-eligibility, race, gender, first-generation status, and incoming high school GPA. Each of these data categories reflects a way in which NLU seeks to understand its unique student population and best meet their needs. Kendall College has similarly researched both local and national norms to set persistence and completion goals for associate degree completion rates, ensuring the college continues to meet or exceed relevant benchmarks.

In addition, NLU engages external research partners to validate institutional effectiveness. For example, a 2024 quasi-experimental evaluation conducted by the University of Chicago Inclusive Economy Lab examined outcomes for participants in the Pathways program (first-time freshman students in the Undergraduate College) and found statistically significant positive impacts on four-year college enrollment, persistence, and bachelor's degree attainment. Together, benchmarking and external evaluation provide multiple forms of evidence to guide goal-setting and continuous improvement.

As described in 3.F., Academic Cabinet engages in quarterly Portfolio Health Dialogues to review the health and effectiveness of academic programming through analysis of enrollment, persistence, and graduate employment outcomes aligned with Annual Program Review metrics. Building on these structured reviews, the dialogues serve as a primary institutional mechanism for evaluating student success outcomes at an aggregate and comparative level across colleges and programs. Academic leaders analyze outcome trends, reflect on areas of strength and opportunity, and collaboratively identify real-time interventions and longer-term strategies to improve student progression and post-completion success. Through peer discussion and Provost-led synthesis, these dialogues translate program review findings into institution-wide insights that inform college planning, continuous improvement efforts, and regular reporting to the Academic Affairs Subcommittee of the Board of Trustees.

Portfolio Health Dialogues connect specific student success outcomes with targeted institutional responses, ensuring that identified trends directly inform improvement actions within the same outcome domain. The table below provides a summary of findings from the AY2025 Q1-Q4 dialogues and interventions and actions identified or taken.

| Academic Unit | Key Insights Across AY25 Dialogues | Interventions & Improvement Actions |
|---------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|---------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|

|                                             |                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Accelerate U                                | Need for consistent tracking of short-cycle program persistence and cohort outcomes                                                                 | Expanded portfolio health inclusion and implemented term-to-term persistence monitoring for AU cohorts beginning AY26 reviews                                                                                              |
| College of Psychology & Behavioral Sciences | Faculty turnover and adjunct reliance affected student connectedness and instructional consistency                                                  | Revised course sequencing, redesigned courses, and initiated faculty hiring efforts to improve engagement and persistence outcomes                                                                                         |
| Florida Programs                            | Rapid enrollment growth required additional student support infrastructure to maintain persistence levels                                           | Added advising and student affairs staffing, strengthened faculty support structures, and coordinated enrollment strategy discussions across leadership teams                                                              |
| Graduate School of Business & Leadership    | Persistence gaps and employment variability identified as improvement priorities                                                                    | Implemented new student orientation focused on persistence, proactive student outreach, faculty observation dashboards, and Career Bridge partnerships, contributing to improved employment outcomes and persistence gains |
| Kendall College                             | Quarter-based program structure created misalignment with traditional persistence measures, limiting accurate interpretation of student progression | Developed alternative persistence views (e.g., summer-to-fall tracking) and refined data segmentation to better align metrics with program structure, improving monitoring of retention trends                             |
| National College of Education               | Persistence dips linked to external factors (funding changes, program intensity, testing requirements) rather than curriculum quality               | Conducted student-level persistence reviews, strengthened advising and enrollment collaboration, and aligned program planning with identified persistence drivers                                                          |

|                                             |                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Undergraduate College<br>*including Nursing | Survey results identified instructional clarity, grading timeliness, and early-course workload as drivers influencing persistence and student experience | Streamlined foundational course expectations, reinforced grading timelines, added clearer student guidance resources, and implemented faculty professional development tied to student feedback to improve persistence outcomes |
| Institution-Wide Themes                     | Colleges requested clearer data definitions, real-time reporting, and improved alignment between institutional and local datasets                        | Enhanced reporting formats, refined methodologies, expanded dashboards, and strengthened cross-unit collaboration to support data-informed decision making                                                                      |

The 2025 Q4 Portfolio Health Dialogue shifted institutional focus from mid-year monitoring to comprehensive annual evaluation and forward planning. Academic leaders reviewed full academic-year outcomes, including enrollment, margin performance, graduate employment, persistence trends, IDEA course feedback, and Noel-Levitz student satisfaction results. Structured small-group and whole-cabinet discussions required each academic unit to identify major successes, analyze persistence-to-graduation pathways, and articulate strategic priorities (“biggest bets”) for the upcoming academic year. This process explicitly connected outcome analysis to AY26 planning, ensuring that institutional priorities were grounded in evidence derived from student success data.

An additional example of institution-wide accountability and outcomes analysis is NLU’s Gainful Employment reporting process. In preparation for federal reporting, the Office of Institutional Research, Student Finance, the Strategic Data Center, and Learning and Information Technology Services (LITS) collaborated to collect, validate, analyze, and submit required student outcome data to the Department of Education. Beyond compliance, this process generated meaningful insights into program-level outcomes, student borrowing patterns, and post-completion earnings, which informed internal discussions about program viability and student success.

### Examples of Student Success-Driven Interventions

Recent program and college-level examples illustrate how student success data are actively used to implement interventions and monitor improvement across the institution:

- **College of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences (CPBS):** Student success data have been used across CPBS programs to inform both academic and co-curricular refinements, particularly in response to enrollment growth, persistence patterns, and post-graduation outcomes. Counseling program persistence data indicated strong Fall-to-Winter continuation overall, though with flatter patterns in some programs.

These trends prompted closer attention to early student experiences, particularly orientation and onboarding, for programs that achieved strong metrics in these areas, serving as points of reference for intervention across CPBS programs.

Multiple programs have shifted to intentionally reframing the first year as inherently challenging, using orientation and early advising to normalize a period of adjustment to the academic rigor of graduate study. Program-specific adjustments have also been informed by student success indicators. The MA in Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABA) program expanded 1:1 mentorship beyond the classroom and modified the thesis timeline to allow modestly increased time for completion. Licensure and certification outcomes have similarly informed program refinement. Certification exam pass rates for ABA graduates increased from 50% in the first year of reported outcomes to 67% in the second year, leading the program to pilot new technology that integrates exam-support modules directly into the curriculum in anticipation of further gains. Counseling-IL graduate licensure outcomes showed variability across tracks (Mental Health Counseling v. School Counseling), underscoring the need for differentiated preparation and advising. In the Illinois School of Professional Psychology (ISPP), approximately 60% of graduates from AY 21-23 are currently licensed, with a goal to grow this number to 80%. The program has actively identified points throughout the curriculum to integrate content directly addressed in the licensure exam, providing students with additional opportunities to encounter the content and the structured testing environment in which the exam is administered.

- **Graduate School of Business and Leadership (GSBL):** To strengthen student persistence and engagement in the Higher Education Leadership (HED) programs, NLU implemented a data-informed program realignment in Summer 2024. To better align the programs with a scholar-practitioner model suited to higher education leadership, the HED MEd and EdD programs were relocated from the NCE to the GSBL. Following the transition, two full-time faculty members, a Program Director and an Assistant Professor, were hired to revitalize the programs and conduct a focused review of student success indicators, including engagement, persistence, and doctoral progression. In response, faculty designed and implemented targeted academic and co-curricular interventions, including enhanced career development programming, networking opportunities, and the Scholars Circle, a biweekly, faculty-facilitated forum supporting dissertation progress and peer community-building. These initiatives launched in January 2026, beginning with a program-wide Meet & Greet that connected students across cohorts with new faculty leadership. The AY 24-25 persistence rate for the EdD program was 80% and MEd at 70%, with a goal to align with the university benchmark of 91% persistence.
- **Kendall College:** Alongside developing KCUL 101 Culinary Math (discussed in 3.F.), the college developed HOS 108 College Success, a college success course, now required for AAS and BA students. HOS 108 was designed to increase students' performance in this "new" learning environment by teaching students about study strategies, institutional supports, academic strengths and weaknesses, time management, and goal-setting. This introductory course will help students on their path to success and foster self-awareness in the college environment.
- **National College of Education (NCE):** In the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) programs, student persistence and timely program completion are directly influenced

by candidates' ability to pass required state content tests, which are necessary for continued enrollment, licensure eligibility, and employment. To support student success, MAT programs provide multiple test-preparation resources, including tutoring and access to preparation modules. Annual review of content test pass-rate data in the MAT Early Childhood Residency Program revealed two persistent challenges: (1) many candidates were not fully utilizing available self-study test preparation resources, and (2) a significant number were not passing the content test by the required deadline, placing persistence and completion at risk. In response, program faculty partnered with the district to implement a coordinated, data-informed intervention strategy. Specifically, the district established and communicated a monthly "test-by" date during the application process, NLU reinforced these deadlines through orientation and ongoing program communications, and program faculty clarified and expanded messaging about tutoring, self-guided preparation options, and opportunities for candidates to meet with instructors, in addition to district-provided resources.

As a result of these aligned interventions, the number of candidates who had not passed the content test by the deadline decreased from 20 in one academic year to one candidate in the following year; notably, that candidate narrowly missed the passing score. This improvement demonstrates how targeted, partnership-based interventions, grounded in student outcome data, can significantly strengthen persistence, licensure attainment, and post-graduation employment outcomes.

- **Undergraduate College (UGC):** Ahead of AY 2024–25, UGC leadership prioritized improving first-to-second-term and fall-to-fall persistence for first-year, first-time students. Institutional research identified key predictors of student success, including early engagement with Success Coaches and consistent course attendance. Data showed that students who met with their assigned Success Coach before the third week of the fall term demonstrated stronger academic outcomes, and that lower-GPA students who engaged early performed comparably to higher-GPA peers who did not.

In response, UGC restructured Success Coach caseloads to ensure focused support for new students beginning with summer onboarding. In Fall 2025, UGC launched the First-Year Student-centered Collaboration for Retention and Engagement (SCoRE) pilot, a coordinated, cross-functional intervention model involving Success Coaches, faculty, and campus partners (Enrollment, Student Finance, Wellness, Housing, and others). Students were flagged for support based on defined risk indicators (e.g., missed coaching meetings, absences, low grades, financial barriers), and teams met regularly to assign targeted interventions and monitor outcomes using shared data dashboards. These efforts resulted in improved term-to-term and year-over-year persistence and strengthened shared responsibility for student success across academic and support units.

UGC also used student success data to refine early academic engagement initiatives. The Student Success Summit, a two-day, faculty-led pre-term experience, was enhanced based on attendance, GPA trends, and student feedback. Improvements included stronger alignment with the GEN 103 Student Success Seminar, expanded community-building activities, and more intentional follow-up by instructors once the term began. Data further informed targeted interventions such as Shoot Your Shot, a structured academic support series for students experiencing early academic challenges. Insights from participation and outcomes guided invitation criteria,

meeting frequency, and faculty and coach engagement.

Collectively, these data-informed strategies have led to stronger first-year academic momentum, fewer students entering high-risk categories, and improved persistence outcomes. This example demonstrates how UGC systematically uses evidence not only to evaluate outcomes but to continuously design, refine, and improve student success initiatives in real time.

NLU's integrated planning and improvement culture ensures that evidence of student learning informs strategic decision-making, leading to meaningful enhancements in curriculum, teaching, and student support. Student success metrics are at the forefront of institutional conversations, including Leadership Team Meetings, Academic Cabinet Meetings, and All-School Meetings that take place near-monthly. In addition, each year the President convenes a Leadership Team retreat during the summer, during which the team reflects on institutional outcomes aligned with the Strategic Plan, which in turn informs revisions to annual goals and sets priorities for the upcoming academic year. In this way, institutional planning and workflows are regularly calibrated toward overall student success.

## Sources

- 4.A. NLU BOT Academic Affairs Committee Charter
- 3.D UGC Y1 SCoRE Agenda and Information
- 3.D. 3.G. Degree Finalization and Graduation Form
- 3.G. 2026 Shoot Your Shot (Academic Support Series)
- 3.G. 2026 Shoot Your Shot Reflection
- 3.G. All School November2025
- 3.G. AY25 Q4 Portfolio Health Data Summary and Analysis GSBL
- 3.G. AY25 Q4 Portfolio Health Data Summary and Analysis UGC
- 3.G. Gainful Employment Executive Overview Fall 2024
- 3.G. HOS 108 CLOs.PLOs - Kendall College
- 3.G. Leadership Retreat FY25 End-of-Year
- 3.G. NLU Student Achievement Data Website
- 3.G. Sample Annual Program Review - 2425 - CPBS - MS EDS in Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA)
- 3.G. Sample Annual Program Review - 2425 - CPBS - MS in Counseling-Illinois
- 3.G. Student Success Summit Announcement Email
- 3.G. Student Success Summit Thank You Email
- 3.G. Syllabus - Kendall - HOS 108
- 3.G. UChicago Report
- 3.G. AY25 Q1-Q4 Portfolio Health Dialogues
- 3.G. Strategic Plan AY25 End-of-Year Update
- 3.G. UGC Get in the Game Summit 2025
- 3.G. Portfolio Health - Winter 2026 - UGC
- 4.A. Academic Cabinet Meeting AY25-26 Meeting Agendas

## **Criterion 3 - Summary**

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

### **Argument**

National Louis University (NLU) demonstrates that its academic programs maintain appropriate levels of rigor and are supported by sufficient faculty and staff, resources, and student services to promote meaningful learning and student success. A coherent academic structure, grounded in clearly articulated learning outcomes and faculty-led governance, ensures curriculum quality across programs and modalities.

University Learning Outcomes (ULOs) are aligned with program and course learning outcomes through curriculum maps, and new or revised offerings undergo structured review to ensure alignment with disciplinary standards and degree-level expectations. Students engage in intellectual inquiry through applied learning, research, internships, and capstone experiences that integrate knowledge and professional skills.

Qualified faculty are supported through evaluation and development processes, while students benefit from coordinated academic and support services. Ongoing assessment of student learning informs continuous improvement, ensuring academic quality and alignment with institutional mission.

### **Sources**

*There are no sources.*

## 4 - Sustainability: Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

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The institution's resources, structures, policies, procedures and planning enable it to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational programs, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

### 4.A Effective Administrative Structures

The institution's administrative structures are effective and facilitate collaborative processes such as shared governance; data-informed decision making; and engagement with internal and external constituencies as appropriate.

#### Argument

National Louis University's (NLU's) administrative structures work in interconnected synergy to advance the institution's mission. The institution's structures of shared governance, data integrity and use, and engagement function together in accordance with the institutional values of innovation, access, excellence, and equity to create exceptional educational experiences for NLU students.

NLU's central operations are led by the Leadership Team, consisting of the President, the Provost, the Vice Provosts, the Vice Presidents of Enrollment and Marketing, Financial Services, Human Resources, Student Affairs, Institutional Advancement, Learning & Information Technology Services, Strategy, Online, and deans from the various NLU colleges. NLU's academic instruction, operations, and student services are centrally managed the Provost Office. In addition, each NLU college has the aforementioned Deans and, often, Associate Deans, along with administrative structures and committees germane to that college, to support the college's operations.

#### NLU Shared Governance

NLU utilizes shared governance structures within its organization to ensure community participation and broad input on policy decisions, planning, and procedures. Stakeholders include the Board of Trustees, leadership, faculty, staff, and students, ensuring informed decisions in the institution's best interests. The university also benefits from its shared governance committee structure, which provides for effective leadership and broad faculty input in academic and student matters. Faculty committees frame and recommend policies and procedures to improve institutional efficacy.

#### Board of Trustees Participation

The Board of Trustees comprises 18 engaged and committed individuals who are well-respected in their fields. The Board's responsibilities are outlined in the university's

Board of Trustees Bylaws. To fulfill these responsibilities effectively, trustees are organized into standing committees, and each trustee serves on at least one committee. Between regularly scheduled meetings, the Executive Committee may act on behalf of the Board as needed.

Through its committee structure, the Board provides focused oversight of academic and student matters (Academic Affairs Committee), financial matters (Financial Affairs Committee), and institutional advancement (Institutional Advancement Committee). Committees meet quarterly, and the full Board convenes four times per year in March, June, September, and December. Trustees also receive periodic reports from the President throughout the year. To support ongoing oversight and informed decision-making, trustees review a Board Dashboard at each meeting, which provides key operational metrics and institutional performance indicators.

At each Committee meeting, trustees review operational reports from Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Finance, and Institutional Advancement, and engage directly with senior staff. The Audit Committee meets twice a year, at the start and completion of the annual external audit cycle, to review audit findings, assess internal controls, and report results to the full Board. Committees exercise oversight through structured review of operational reports, discussions with institutional leaders, and, when appropriate, engagement with other constituents. For example, at its December 6, 2024 meeting, the Academic Affairs Committee received a presentation and provided feedback regarding the University's new Eagle Retain software developed in-house by Learning and Information Technology Services (LITS) and discussed in Criterion 3.D.

Committees deliberate on matters within their charge and make recommendations for full Board action, as appropriate. In February 2025, for example, the Financial Affairs Committee reviewed and approved the proposed 2025-2026 tuition rates before submitting them to the full Board. Committee reports and recommendations are documented in meeting minutes, ensuring transparency and shared understanding among all trustees. Minutes from the June 2025 meeting reflect how the Financial Affairs Committee advanced budget recommendations to the full Board, which were subsequently approved.

Representative Board of Trustees Meeting Documentation:

- Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes - March 2024
- Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes - September 2024
- Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes - March 2025
- Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes - June 2025

## **Academic Cabinet**

NLU's Academic Cabinet serves as the university's central forum for collaboration, decision-making, and communication among the institution's most senior academic leadership. It is responsible for advancing academic excellence within the institution, a key pillar in the University's strategic plan. The Cabinet and its members strive for academic excellence by developing, shaping, and implementing initiatives in four key strategic priority areas: supporting faculty success and advancement, strengthening instructional quality and student learning, advancing faculty thought leadership, and optimizing academic operations and processes. The Academic Cabinet meets twice a month and includes the University Provost,

Vice Provosts, College Deans, and other key Academic Unit Leaders.

## **Faculty Involvement**

NLU faculty governance structure comprises the Faculty Association, the principal agent of faculty governance, and the Faculty Senate, which has the legislative charge of the Faculty Association. The Faculty Senate supports setting and maintaining academic standards through their charge to formulate policy governing the facilitation of teaching and research (2.A., 2.B., & 2.E.); faculty standards (3.C.); faculty appointments, retention, ranking, tenure, sabbaticals and promotion (3.C.); freedom of expression and academic freedom (2.D.); student life as it relates directly to academic affairs (3.D.); academic services (3.D.); and curriculum and program review (3.F.). The Senate, in cooperation with the Provost, reviews and provides recommendations on student standards, including admission, graduation, honors, and academic appeals (2.A.).

The Faculty Senate functions through representative committees to advance standing charges, strategic plan priorities aligned with the 2030 NLU Strategic Plan, and annual charges assigned each year by the Provost and the Senate Executive Committee (which meets weekly with the President and Provost). The Faculty Senate meets monthly to review progress on these charges and engage with institutional initiatives through presentations from units, such as Student Affairs, the Registrar's Office, and the Learning & Information Technology Services departments. Recently, at Faculty Senate meetings, a new session was added to the agenda featuring spotlights on certain faculty and programs so others could gain an understanding of the work of other University programs and the best practices used by each. Each Faculty Senate meeting also includes an update from the Provost and the Chief Financial Officer on University results and operations.

Examples of documentation demonstrating Faculty Senate governance and engagement include:

- AY26 Faculty Senate Charge Recommendations outlining the annual priorities and areas of policy development undertaken by the Senate committees.
- Faculty Association Meeting Minutes documenting faculty governance deliberations and actions.
- Faculty Senate Meeting Materials (Representative Samples), including agendas, presentations, and minutes illustrating Senate review of academic initiatives, institutional updates, and progress on standing charges.

Representative Faculty Senate Meeting Documentation:

- Faculty Senate Meeting Materials – October 2025
- Faculty Senate Meeting Materials – November 2025
- Faculty Senate Meeting Materials – December 2025
- Faculty Senate Meeting Materials – January 2026

In addition to the formal shared governance structure, NLU maintains several standing and ad hoc committees that bring together faculty and staff from across the institution to advance specific institutional priorities. The Adjunct Council serves as a formal mechanism for adjunct faculty to engage in institutional dialogue, provide feedback on teaching and working conditions, and contribute to discussions related to academic quality, faculty support, and student success. Through its collaboration with the Center for Teaching and Learning

Excellence (CTLE) and academic leadership, the Adjunct Council helps ensure that the perspectives of part-time faculty, who play a critical role in instructional delivery, are incorporated into institutional decision-making and continuous improvement efforts.

NLU also maintains several standing and ad hoc committees that bring together faculty and staff to advance institutional priorities. These include the University Assessment Council (discussed in 3.E.), which provides leadership and coordination for assessment of student learning, and the University Leadership Council (ULC), a cross-university body convened by the President on an as-needed basis to work on special projects and initiatives. One example of how and why ULC is convened was its recent work furthering Service Excellence at NLU. Service Excellence was identified as a strategic priority by the President and university leadership in the 2030 strategic plan based on student, faculty, and staff feedback (slides 57-66). In AY 2023, the President directed ULC to develop a strategy to evaluate service performance and enhance the service experience for students, employees, and community partners. The resulting multi-year initiative identified five Service Values and 15 Service Best Practices. Over the past three years, leadership has been working with stakeholders across the university to apply these values and practices to hiring, training, evaluation, communications, and operations across NLU's departments, colleges, and campuses. The five Service Values are Collaborative, Accountable, Responsive, Empathetic, and Solution-Oriented (CARES).

### **Staff Council**

NLU staff play an important role in shared governance and institutional decision-making. The university provides structured opportunities for staff to contribute to planning, policy development, and workplace initiatives, reinforcing a culture of collaboration and institutional stewardship.

Staff Council serves as the primary vehicle for staff representation and shared governance. As an elected body representing staff across the institution, it advises university leadership on matters related to staff experience and institutional effectiveness. Through this structure, staff contribute perspectives that inform policies, workplace culture, and institutional initiatives, ensuring their voices are incorporated into decision-making.

Together, these committees and councils support institutional effectiveness by fostering collaboration, ensuring opportunities for meaningful input, and maintaining academic quality and program rigor.

### **Student-Informed Decision-Making**

At NLU, student perspectives are incorporated into institutional decision-making through multiple, intentional feedback mechanisms designed to inform effective administrative planning and continuous improvement. Rather than relying on a single governance structure, NLU gathers student input through surveys, focus groups, advisory engagement, and direct feedback channels, providing both quantitative and qualitative insights into the student experience.

These mechanisms include institution-wide instruments such as the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey, IDEA course evaluations, graduate surveys, and purposeful focus groups, which collectively inform decisions related to academic programs, student support services, resource allocation, and institutional priorities (discussed in 3.D.). Results are

reviewed by academic and administrative leaders and integrated into planning processes at the program, college, and university levels. To probe deeper on the feedback from the Noel-Levitz student survey conducted in Spring 2025, the Vice President of Student Affairs (VPSA) is conducting a series of townhalls.

NLU is committed to strengthening student voice and enhancing structured opportunities for student engagement in institutional dialogue. In Academic Year 2025-26, the university revived the Campus Leadership Board, currently composed of six undergraduate students, with the goal of expanding representation across programs and campuses. Elections for Academic Year 2026-27 will be held in Spring 2026 to broaden participation and ensure continuity. The Campus Leadership Board serves as the official voice of the student body, driving advocacy, leadership, and policy initiatives that shape the university experience. The Campus Leadership Board met with the Provost and the VPSA in Winter 2026 to share perspectives on the student experience and institutional priorities. In addition to participating in campus-wide events and forums, the Campus Leadership Board has hosted structured engagement opportunities to facilitate dialogue between students and university leadership. This included a Pizza with the Provost event and a town hall with the VPSA. This initiative is intended to complement existing feedback mechanisms by creating additional opportunities for student engagement and dialogue, further ensuring that administrative structures remain responsive to student needs and experiences.

### **Data Governance and Informed Decision-Making**

Administrative leadership, faculty, and staff use collaboratively created and maintained data reports and dashboards from the Institutional Research, Business Intelligence, and Assessment and Accreditation departments. Examples of these reports and dashboards include:

- Portfolio Health Measures (enrollment, persistence, and completion reports)
- Student Affairs operational metrics
- Faculty load dashboard
- Credit hour compliance reports
- Course status reports
- Schedule Optimization metrics

Supporting this work is the University's Strategic Data Center, a centralized group that addresses the data needs for various departments. This group has a data request and prioritization process and shares project highlights of this work in monthly meetings with the President, Provost, and Chief Financial Officer.

To promote consistent and effective data use, the University maintains standardized Data Definitions for key reporting terms, Privacy Policy, Policy on Acceptable Use of Information Systems, and a Data Governance Policy to ensure its consistent application. The university also has two groups that meet monthly to establish, review, and align on data management issues: the Data Governance Council and the Data Operations Group, which provide an additional layer of oversight for data used in continuous improvement. In addition, the University periodically holds data workshops to ensure users understand the reports available to them and how to obtain the data that might help inform their work. These data are used for multiple purposes and are referenced and shared with individuals, groups, committees, and relevant audiences to support data-informed decision-making throughout

the institution and to best meet stakeholder needs and strategic goals.

As emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence become more integrated into institutional workflows, the university has also begun developing guidance and training resources to support responsible and effective use of these tools in alignment with institutional data governance and privacy expectations.

Examples of AI guidance and responsible use include:

- [Data Privacy Points Sheet](#)
- [AI Usage Policy](#)
- [High-level AI Data Procedures](#)

## Engaging Internal and External Constituencies

To support effective administration and informed decision-making, NLU engages a range of [internal and external partners](#) through clearly differentiated structures and purposes.

External engagement at NLU includes both collaborative stakeholder input and strategic partnerships with vetted and contracted firms that provide specialized expertise and operational capacity in support of institutional priorities.

These external partnerships are intentionally structured to strengthen institutional effectiveness, risk management, compliance, and strategic execution. NLU leadership maintains direct oversight of all contracted services, ensuring that external partners' work aligns with the university's mission, values, and strategic goals. Through these relationships, NLU gains access to sector expertise and scalable capacity while retaining institutional ownership of strategy, decision-making, and outcomes.

To support key operational and strategic functions, NLU partners with external firms that provide specialized expertise while working under the direction and oversight of university leadership, as summarized in the table below.

| Area                            | External Partner Role                                                        | NLU Leadership Oversight                                                                                         | Purpose & Alignment                                                                  |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Banking & Treasury Services     | Manages banking relationships and financial services                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chief Financial Officer &amp; Senior Vice President of Finance</li></ul> | Supports fiscal stewardship, liquidity management, and financial risk mitigation     |
| Government Relations            | Monitors policy developments and engages with state and federal stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Vice President of Institutional Advancement</li></ul>                    | Supports advocacy, regulatory awareness, and alignment with public policy priorities |
| Information Technology Services | Provides specialized IT infrastructure, security, and systems support        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chief Information Officer &amp; Vice President of LITS</li></ul>         | Enhances system reliability, cybersecurity, and technology modernization             |

|                                        |                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Legal Services<br>(Labor & Employment) | Provides legal counsel on labor, employment, and compliance matters            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice President of Human Resources</li> </ul>                                                                                           | Ensures regulatory compliance, risk management, and sound employment practices               |
| Public Relations & Communications      | Provides strategic communications counsel, media relations, and crisis support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice President of Communications</li> <li>• Chief Marketing Officer &amp; Senior Vice President of Marketing and Enrollment</li> </ul> | Supports brand awareness, mission-aligned messaging, and institutional reputation management |

In parallel, the university engages broader educational and professional communities through participation in conferences, professional associations, and peer networks. Insights gained from these engagements inform institutional planning, benchmarking, and continuous improvement by situating NLU's work within the evolving higher education landscape.

Formal mechanisms for engaging stakeholders—such as braintrusts and advisory boards (discussed in 1.B. and 3.A.) and systematic student feedback processes (outlined in 2.A. and 3.D.) — complement these operational partnerships by ensuring that institutional decisions are informed by the perspectives of learners, employers, and community partners. Together, these differentiated approaches support effective administrative structures by balancing expert capacity, stakeholder input, and mission-driven leadership.

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## 4.B Resource Base and Sustainability

The institution's financial and personnel resources effectively support its current operations. The institution's financial management balances short-term needs with long-term commitments and ensures its ongoing sustainability.

### Argument

NLU's resource base supports its educational offerings and its plans to maintain and strengthen its quality in the future, as evidenced by rigorous financial planning in concert with the University's strategic priorities to support university infrastructure and build capacity in service of students.

### Financial Health and Sustainability

In its resource allocations and budget reviews, NLU takes into account the university's needs, including talent, physical facilities, and technological infrastructure, ensuring each provides a strong foundation for its educational offerings and future growth. In addition, the quality and adequacy of each are assessed annually. The University has a standard budget planning calendar (2026 and 2027) that begins in the winter with defined timing of all the steps associated with the completion of the budget for the upcoming year, which includes:

- Tuition Price Setting
- Enrollment Projections for the Upcoming Year
- Continuing Student Information
- Revenue Projections
- Expense Projections and Submissions
- Departmental Budget Reviews
- Investment prioritization
- Budget Balancing
- Board Review
- Dissemination of the Budget

As part of the budgeting and planning process listed above, budget leaders submit their proposals through a standardized "budget story" presentation that situates financial requests within enrollment trends, student impact, staffing capacity, and strategic priorities. These presentations highlight prior-year performance, forecasted growth or need, accreditation requirements, and trade-offs under constrained or expanded resources, enabling senior leadership and the Board of Trustees to engage in informed, mission-aligned fiscal decision-making.

The University's budget-setting process is a modified zero-based budgeting process. All positions are evaluated each year as part of the budget review process, and a breakdown for all expenses (accompanied by details of all expenses over \$10,000) is included in the budget to evaluate the importance of each item in the operation for the upcoming year. The information accompanying all departmental budget requests is summarized and reviewed by each budget head with a Budget Review Committee (consisting of the President, Provost,

Chief Financial Officer, and VP-Human Resources). These meetings give every budget head an opportunity to justify their requests. Following these meetings, the Budget Review Committee prioritizes requests and funds them to the extent possible within the budget. The results of the Budget Review Committee's discussion are also reviewed with the President's Leadership Team. The final budget is presented to and approved by the Board of Trustees' Financial Affairs Committee as part of a consent agenda, and the budget is then implemented on July 1 of each fiscal year.

A measurement of the strength of the university's financial position is its Liquidity Ratio, defined as Unrestricted Cash and Investments as a percentage of Debt Outstanding. On June 30, 2025, the University's Liquidity Ratio was 4.1, about 4 times the 0.80 level required under the university's debt covenants. This overage translates into about \$65 million in excess cash and investments held by the university beyond what is required under the university's debt covenants. Because of the strength in the University's financial condition, this is the only financial covenant the University's debt obligations currently require, whereas many institutions have others, including a Debt Service Coverage ratio. Two other measures of financial health are evidenced by NLU's Department of Education Stability Ratio, which has been the maximum possible 3.0 for the last five years, and the University's Composite Financial Index (CFI), which was at 7.8 as of June 30, 2025, translating to an institution that is "Thriving" per the CFI rubric. These statistics illustrate how the University is very diligent in managing cash and investments to provide funds for future educational investment, as may be required.

NLU's financial stewardship is further supported through formal financial governance policies and lender agreements that guide debt management, liquidity oversight, and investment practices. These documents establish the financial parameters within which the university operates and provide external validation of the institution's compliance with financial obligations and long-term financial planning practices.

Examples of financial governance documentation include:

- Bank Loan and Credit Agreement
- Continuing Covenants Compliance Letter
- Investment Policy

Together, these financial planning and oversight practices ensure that institutional resources are aligned with long-term sustainability while remaining responsive to evolving academic and student needs.

### **Support for Educational Offerings and Student Support Services**

The University maintains a well-developed, institution-wide budgeting and resource allocation process that prioritizes the sustainability of academic programs and the effectiveness of student support services. Analyses of expenditures from the prior five fiscal years indicate that over 89% of the University's budget was dedicated directly to instruction, academic support, and student services, demonstrating a sustained commitment to student learning and success and intentional investment aligned with institutional priorities (see Criterion 4.C).

As part of its annual budgeting and planning cycle, NLU reviews program margins, enrollment trends, and faculty-to-student ratios to assess staffing sufficiency and resource

alignment. These data-informed rubrics are examined during budget review meetings to ensure that programs are appropriately resourced and positioned for long-term sustainability.

To support high-quality, affordable educational offerings, the institution strategically invests in scalable instructional infrastructure and technology that maximizes impact, as detailed by the following examples and capital expenditures evidence:

- **Scalable and Sustainable Course Design:** The Learning Experience Design (LXD) team develops and maintains standardized, high-quality course templates aligned with Quality Matters standards, enabling efficient course development and consistent learning experiences across modalities while reducing long-term redesign costs.
- **Instructional Technology to Expand Access and Efficiency:** In science courses, NLU leverages virtual and simulated laboratory technologies to provide rigorous experiential learning without the financial and space constraints of traditional wet labs. In education programs, field placement management technologies automate communications and tracking, allowing placement coordinators to support a larger number of students effectively while maintaining quality oversight.
- **Enterprise Systems for Academic Planning:** The university recently implemented Coursera to strengthen academic scheduling and resource forecasting, improving the institution's ability to ensure students have access to required courses when needed and supporting efficient faculty and classroom utilization.
- **Responsible Use of Educational Technologies:** LXD and Learning and Information Technology Services collaborate to evaluate instructional tools, avoid unnecessary software redundancy, and prioritize cost-effective enhancements to the learning management system. AI-enabled tools are used selectively to support feedback and engagement, allowing faculty to focus time on high-impact instructional interactions.

## Physical Facilities and Learning Environments

NLU maintains a geographically distributed physical footprint that supports its academic programs, student services, and community engagement across Illinois and Florida. Facilities are intentionally aligned with program delivery, enrollment patterns, and regional workforce needs. The facilities are maintained through a combination of ownership, long-term leases, and planned capital investment.

NLU has a main campus (consisting of two primary buildings) in downtown Chicago, with two satellite campuses in surrounding Chicago suburbs (Wheeling and Lisle), and a campus in Tampa, FL.

- **Chicago Main Campus:** NLU's Chicago Campus consists of two owned facilities located at 122 S. Michigan Avenue and a second property at 18 S. Michigan Avenue, collectively providing approximately 278,000 square feet of instructional, administrative, and student support space. Since 2018, NLU has expanded its footprint at 18 S. Michigan to support Kendall College programs and allied health initiatives, and now owns 11 of the 12 floors in that building. Across both locations, the Chicago campus houses 70 classrooms, 7 computer labs, and more than 350 offices and workstations, with direct access to public transportation and proximity to cultural and civic resources. Both buildings are maintained through condominium ownership structures with centralized facility management, resulting in minimal deferred maintenance.

- **Wheeling Campus (Illinois):** The Wheeling campus is an owned facility totaling 89,460 square feet and includes 13 classrooms, 2 computer labs, the University Library's main print collection, and approximately 140 offices. In 2025, NLU completed a major renovation of the front entryway to improve energy efficiency, ventilation, and campus aesthetics. Known future maintenance needs include roof and HVAC system replacement, estimated at approximately \$500,000 over the next decade and incorporated into long-term facilities planning.
- **Lisle Campus (Illinois):** NLU's Lisle campus, where the University has maintained a presence since 2005, occupies 57,350 square feet under a long-term lease extended through 2031. The facility includes classrooms, offices, lounges, and a public forum space, and houses the nationally-recognized Reading Recovery Center. As a leased facility, maintenance and upkeep are the landlord's responsibility, ensuring the building remains in good condition.
- **Tampa Campus (Florida):** NLU has been in the Tampa, FL area since 1988. The campus relocated in August 2024 to a larger leased facility totaling 22,496 square feet, an increase of approximately 8,000 square feet from the prior location. The new campus includes expanded instructional space, student services areas, a computer lab, and multiple common spaces, including a cafeteria, wellness facility, and outdoor patio. The design reflects direct input from students and staff and supports the continued growth of academic programs and student services in Florida.

## Facilities Stewardship and Capital Funding

NLU maintains its facilities through proactive maintenance, periodic renovation, and planned capital investment aligned with enrollment growth and programmatic needs. Capital improvements are supported through a combination of institutional resources, public funding, and philanthropy, including:

- \$11.2 million in State of Illinois capital reimbursement funding (2024–2029)
- \$750,000 in federal earmarked funding supporting nursing facilities
- Private gifts and foundation support aligned with strategic initiatives

This diversified funding approach allows the university to enhance facilities while preserving operating resources for instruction, staffing, and student support.

## Strategic Infrastructure Investments

One key to providing a quality education is a sound infrastructure that meets the needs of both students and the community. The following are various projects that began or were completed in the last five years that demonstrate the university's commitment to continually improving infrastructure for the betterment of the community:

- **Allied Health Lab and Space:** In an effort to address a shortage of allied health professionals in the community, the University developed nursing and medical assisting programs in 2022-2023 and continues to expand its Allied Health space for these programs on the 6th floor at 18 S. Michigan Ave. The University is currently developing new Physician Assistant, Occupational Therapy, and Physical Therapy programs to address the increasing need for professionals in these areas, and NLU has begun receiving architectural drawings for the space that will house these programs. The University has received \$8 million in private funding to help with the

launch of these programs.

- **Classroom Renovations:** Two classrooms have been upgraded with auditorium seating for more than 50 students, enhancing teaching capacity and learning environments.
- **New Bakery/Pastry Kitchen:** In response to growing interest in baking and pastry-making among Kendall College students, the University is currently building a new bakery/pastry kitchen to meet demand.
- **New Career Bridge and Advancement Offices:** NLU is renovating the 11th floor of 18 S. Michigan Ave., which the university purchased in June 2024. This space will house the Institutional Advancement Office, relocated from 122 S. Michigan Ave., and will also provide expanded, dedicated space for the Career Bridge department. The new offices are designed to better support students seeking internships and employment by giving Career Bridge the room and resources needed to meet growing student demand.
- **New Events/Workshop and Cafeteria Space:** In March 2024, NLU purchased the 12th floor at 18 S. Michigan, which is the top floor of the building. NLU is now renovating this space to include a kitchen, enabling lunch service in a cafeteria for the entire Chicago campus community at about \$7 per lunch, which is much more affordable than fast-food options in the area. In addition to providing affordable lunch service to students, this cafeteria will provide a community atmosphere for faculty and staff. When not used for lunch service, the floor can be converted into space for events, workshops, and speakers, with a seating capacity of 400. The renovation process is scheduled to be completed by the end of January 2026.
- **One-Stop Student Services Center:** The one-stop Student Services area constructed on the 2nd floor of 122 S. Michigan was part of an effort to make the front entry space into the University more welcoming and to provide one central area where students can go to get all of their questions answered, whether they are about enrollment, advising, student finance, career assistance, or anything else. Previously, students had to go to various departments on different floors and in different buildings for such services.
- **Wheeling Front Entryway:** The front entryway at Wheeling had deteriorated over the years and had become energy inefficient. NLU recently renovated this space, installing new windows and a new entryway to improve energy efficiency and create a more welcoming entryway.

Together, these investments demonstrate NLU's commitment to maintaining modern, mission-aligned learning environments that support student success, community engagement, and long-term institutional sustainability.

## **Revenue Growth and Resource Base Expansion**

Since 2022, NLU has seen an increase in revenue, reflecting organic and strategic growth through new and expanded programs and initiatives, providing a strong resource base to support existing operations and plan for the future. A significant growth in revenue has been a result of various initiatives, such as the following:

- The acquisition of Kendall College in 2018 has added approximately \$10 million in incremental revenues to the University.
- The launch of the Pathways program for traditional first-time freshmen in 2015 has grown to \$15 million in 2024.

- Teach-out and assumption of various programs, including those of Argosy in 2019 and those of Union Institute in 2024.
- New programs, such as the introduction of the University's Accelerate U program in 2020 (with majors in Medical Assistant, Registered Behavior Technician, and IT Support Specialist), as well as the nursing program in 2023.

## **Institutional Advancement**

Institutional Advancement (IA) is an essential component of NLU's financial strategy because it not only fuels current operations but also lays the foundation for future sustainability. The University is moving from transactional fundraising to transformational philanthropy, with a long-term goal of cultivating relationships that yield major gifts and sustainable donor engagement.

The IA unit advances NLU's mission by securing philanthropic support from foundations, corporations, government agencies, alumni, and individual donors to enhance existing programs and launch new initiatives that expand access, affordability, and career-relevant education. Over the past three fiscal years, philanthropic revenue at NLU has increased by 38%, with IA meeting or exceeding annual fundraising goals. In FY25, IA generated \$16.6 million in total revenue—104% of its \$16 million target—including \$9.6 million in government grants and \$5.4 million in foundation grants. This growth reflects a deliberate strategy to align fundraising with the university's Strategic Plan and emerging academic priorities.

Recent philanthropic investments illustrate how IA strengthens institutional capacity:

- \$5 million from the Robert R. McCormick Foundation to support the launch of the McCormick Institute for Early Childhood at NLU;
- \$8 million from an anonymous Chicago foundation and donor to support the development of the Physician Assistant, Physical Therapy, and Occupational Therapy programs
- \$902,500 from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation to expand Accelerate U
- \$500,000 from Crankstart to support NLU's Learn and Earn in Three (LE3) program
- \$500,000 from an anonymous national foundation to advance infrastructure support
- \$3,244,394 from the US Department of Education to support Research Infrastructure
- \$1,341,279 from the US Department of Education to expand Teacher Residency programs
- \$1,097,323 from the National Science Foundation to support High School STEM Teacher Preparation
- \$832,161 from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to expand STEM programming

To sustain this momentum, NLU has invested in strengthening its advancement infrastructure, including adding three new IA positions focused on advancement strategy and donor engagement, enhancing stewardship practices, and relaunching planned giving and individual giving initiatives. These efforts support the University's long-term financial resilience while reinforcing its commitment to affordability, accessibility, and mission-driven growth.

## **LITS Supporting Sustainability**

NLU's Learning and Information Technology Services (LITS) unit plays a central role in

sustaining the institution's operational effectiveness, instructional continuity, and long-term capacity. LITS manages the university's core technology infrastructure through planned investment, lifecycle management, and risk mitigation strategies, ensuring systems remain current, secure, and reliable.

To support sustainability, LITS maintains a regular replacement and refresh cycle for faculty and staff devices, networking and data center equipment, and enterprise applications. Software inventories are centrally tracked, with systems regularly reviewed for continued relevance, security, and cost-effectiveness. These practices support both fiscal stewardship and continuity of operations by reducing unplanned disruptions.

LITS partners with vetted third-party providers to strengthen service delivery and system resilience. NLU contracts with Ellucian's Central Help Desk (CHD) to provide 24/7/365 technical support for students, faculty, and staff, resolving the majority of issues at first contact. While detailed student-facing support is addressed in Criterion 3.D., this partnership reflects NLU's approach to scaling support services sustainably while maintaining performance accountability through monthly service-level reporting. In addition, LITS works with Heartland to support cybersecurity and system availability through ongoing vulnerability scanning, automated patching, and dashboard-based risk monitoring, ensuring that institutional data and systems are protected in alignment with best practices.

Beyond infrastructure and operations, LITS is charged with advancing institutional innovation in support of student success and efficiency. Led by the Chief Technology Officer, LITS functions as a research-and-development unit that assesses business processes, pilots new solutions, and scales successful initiatives. A recent example is the development of Eagle Retain, an internally built retention and early-alert platform designed to improve real-time student support and institutional responsiveness (discussed further in 3.D.). This initiative demonstrates how LITS aligns innovation with mission-driven outcomes while leveraging internal expertise to reduce reliance on external systems.

Together, these practices illustrate how LITS supports institutional sustainability through intentional investment, risk management, innovation, and alignment with strategic priorities.

## **A Diversified Outlook**

The continued success of NLU's financial strategy hinges on diversified revenue streams, including individuals, government entities, private foundations, and organizations. Furthermore, increased individual and foundation giving, in particular, is more critical than ever with the uncertainty of continued government funding in the current political climate.

In addition to diversified revenue streams, NLU recognizes the diverse work of colleges, departments, and positions that support the university's mission, as well as the work required to break down silos and foster collaboration. One mechanism to foster cross-departmental work and understanding is the President's Director's Strategy Forum. Held several times a year, the Strategy Forum brings together leaders from across campus for mission-focused professional development and idea generation.

One such example of a Strategy Forum session occurred in June 2025. Leading up to NLU's 2026 HLC Mid-Cycle Review, NLU conducted a workshop to dissect the mission statement and align the work of different departments with it, in preparation for the mission-centered focus of the revised HLC Criteria. This three-hour session engaged the group in reflecting on

and analyzing the university's mission and in exploring how each NLU department supports it in its own way. After dissecting the NLU mission statement as a group, Strategy Forum participants used that dissection to springboard into activities that allowed the different university units to clearly articulate their alignment with the mission, allowing those units to revisit their purpose and better understand the point of view of other areas of campus by discussing their overlapping efforts.

Together, NLU's intentional budgeting, financial stewardship, infrastructure investments, and diversified resource development demonstrate a stable and sustainable resource base that supports current operations and strengthens the institution's capacity to maintain educational quality into the future.

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## 4.C Planning for Quality Improvement

The institution engages in systematic strategic planning for quality improvement. It relies on data, integrating its insights from enrollment forecasts, financial capacity, student learning assessment, institutional operations and the external environment.

### Argument

NLU's approach to strategic planning reflects a mature, closed-loop system of continuous improvement that integrates institutional data, planning processes, and resource allocation. Institutional leaders regularly analyze data on enrollment trends, student learning outcomes, financial performance, and operational effectiveness. These insights inform strategic priorities, guide investment decisions, and shape academic and operational initiatives. Progress is then monitored through structured leadership reviews, board oversight, and institutional dashboards, allowing the university to evaluate outcomes and refine strategies as needed. Through this integrated cycle of analysis, planning, action, and evaluation, NLU ensures that institutional planning directly supports educational quality, student success, and long-term sustainability.

### Strategic Planning Development and Framework

The 2030 Strategic Plan was developed through a combination of internal analysis and external scanning, including market research, stakeholder input (e.g., student focus groups and employer interviews), and industry benchmarking. Using the same feedback systems, the 2030 strategic plan was revised at the mid-point in 2025, as discussed in 1.A.

The plan articulates the work NLU believes is necessary to live out its mission and is structured around five strategic pillars:

- Pillar 1: Preparing Our Students for the World of Work
- Pillar 2: Promoting Students' Personal Growth, Engagement, and Well-being
- Pillar 3: Building and Fostering a Culture of Inclusion and Excellence
- Pillar 4: Advancing Academic Excellence
- Pillar 5: Embracing the Future

Priorities within each pillar are reviewed regularly and refined to reflect changing student needs, market conditions, and institutional performance.

### Strategy to Action: Annual Planning and Accountability

NLU operationalizes the 2030 strategic plan through an annual action-planning process in which pillar priorities and outcomes are translated into institution-wide annual goals and action plans. Each year, leadership reviews progress from the prior year, analyzes internal performance data, and considers external trends and market shifts to determine institutional priorities for the upcoming cycle. When annual priorities are established, a strategy owner is assigned, and a cross-functional team is formed to execute the initiative.

Strategy owners, supported by cross-functional teams, develop action plans with defined milestones, timelines, and accountabilities. This model promotes shared ownership, cross-departmental collaboration, and diverse perspectives in implementation. Progress on strategic initiatives is reviewed biannually and updates are provided to the Board of Trustees (such as in the [AY25 Mid-Year Strategic Plan Update](#), [AY25 End-of-Year Strategic Plan Update](#), and [AY26 Mid-Year Strategic Plan Update](#)), which summarize institutional performance across the strategic pillars and identify areas requiring additional attention. In addition, the Leadership Team reviews progress during semiannual retreats, including the [FY25 Mid-Year](#) and the [FY25 End-of-Year Leadership Retreats](#), where institutional performance data, market conditions, and priorities are analyzed to inform adjustments to strategy and resource allocation. The Academic Cabinet conducts quarterly reviews of academic strategies and related performance indicators. Progress updates are also shared with the broader NLU community during All School meetings (with examples here from [January 2025](#), [May 2025](#), and [November 2025](#) ).

### **Alignment of Resources and Data-Informed Decision-Making**

NLU deliberately aligns institutional investments with mission priorities through structured, data-informed decision-making. The university's business intelligence infrastructure, maintained by a dedicated department, the Strategic Data Center (SDC), integrates data on student learning, retention and completion, employment outcomes, enrollment performance, financial health, student engagement, and equity indicators. These data are reviewed routinely by institutional leadership and governance bodies and serve as a primary input into both strategic prioritization and resource allocation.

Importantly, data is not reviewed in isolation. Performance trends are examined in relation to strategic plan pillars, academic portfolio health, and operational capacity. This integrated review process ensures that investments support areas of demonstrated need, emerging opportunity, or institutional risk. As a result, resource allocation decisions are anchored in evidence rather than anecdote and are evaluated against their contribution to student success, program quality, and long-term sustainability.

This data-informed approach is also applied at the unit level. For example, the University Library uses workload planning documents, appointment data, and reference interaction data to evaluate service capacity. As demand increased, these data, combined with enrollment projections and benchmarking against Association of College and Research Libraries standards, identified a need for additional staffing. During the [FY24–25 budgeting process](#), this analysis supported the approval of an additional librarian position, ensuring continued alignment between academic support services and institutional growth.

### **Institutional Operations Improvements**

NLU applies the same data-informed model to institutional operations to improve efficiency, responsiveness, and the student experience. For example, analysis of transfer student data and feedback identified transcript evaluation turnaround time as a barrier to timely enrollment and degree planning. In response, the university launched a [24-Hour Transfer Evaluation Initiative](#), supported by an automated Salesforce dashboard, to streamline evaluation queuing and workflow reminders. Additional policy reviews and efforts to expand the articulation database were undertaken to improve credit applicability and transparency for prospective students. These operational enhancements reduced delays, improved

visibility into the transfer credit application, and strengthened the student onboarding experience.

Similarly, NLU initiated a comprehensive Scheduling Optimization project to address course demand forecasting, scheduling inefficiencies, and late course adjustments. Following an audit of scheduling practices across colleges, the university implemented advanced demand modeling tools and adopted Coursedog Course Demand Projections to support more accurate projections and streamlined scheduling workflows. Power BI dashboards were developed to monitor course utilization, cancellations, and course-by-arrangement patterns. These efforts aim to reduce administrative burden, improve alignment between course offerings and student demand, and ultimately enable year-long scheduling and greater student self-registration, strengthening both financial sustainability and student progression.

### **Integration of Planning, Assessment, and Budgeting**

At NLU, strategic planning, student learning assessment, and budgeting operate as an integrated, mutually reinforcing system. Evidence from student learning assessment, program review, enrollment trends, and financial performance is intentionally used to inform institutional priorities, guide resource allocation, and evaluate the effectiveness of investments. This closed-loop approach ensures that planning and budgeting decisions are informed by data and aligned with the university's mission, strategic plan, and student success goals. This integration ensures that evidence of student learning, program effectiveness, and operational performance directly influences strategic priorities and budgetary decisions rather than functioning as separate review processes.

Insights from strategic plan reviews, assessment results, enrollment and persistence data, and program-level performance metrics are synthesized throughout the year and directly inform the annual budgeting process (described in Core Component 4.B.). Through this process, the university ensures that resources are sufficient to support educational quality, address areas of need identified through assessment and program review, and advance strategic priorities. Budget heads engage their units in reviewing assessment findings and operational data to identify needs and propose investments that strengthen student learning and institutional effectiveness.

In its prioritization process, the Budget Review Committee evaluates projects for budget consideration as to how well each of the following line up with the following considerations, and the projects that best fit these areas are more likely to be funded:

- Aligns with a strategic plan pillar
- Cares for an inadequate staff or faculty-to-student ratio
- Provides a robust return on investment
- Addresses a student service need
- Aligns with an accreditation requirement

The University's ongoing monitoring enables timely decision-making and course correction. The weekly University Operations Group (UOG) reviews enrollment, marketing, and financial metrics, allowing leadership to identify emerging risks, reallocate resources, and adjust strategy in real time. In parallel, student retention, completion, employment, satisfaction, and equity indicators are regularly reviewed to ensure that institutional actions remain responsive to student outcomes.

Academic quality and program health are monitored through the Academic Cabinet and established program review and portfolio health processes (see 3.F.). Academic health metrics, assessment findings, enrollment trends, and operational considerations inform both strategic planning priorities and budgetary decisions, ensuring that academic programs are appropriately resourced to provide high-quality education.

## **Enrollment Planning and Market Awareness**

Enrollment planning is central to NLU's long-term sustainability and is integrated with institutional strategic planning and budgeting processes. Marketing and enrollment data provide critical market intelligence that informs program development, resource allocation, and enrollment growth strategies. Enrollment strategy development and implementation are managed collaboratively across Enrollment, Marketing, Academic Affairs, Institutional Research, and Student Affairs, ensuring alignment between recruitment efforts, academic program capacity, institutional priorities, and student success supports.

Operational oversight is maintained through weekly University Operations Group (UOG) meetings, where senior leaders review application pipeline health, marketing lead performance, start projections, yield rates, and retention indicators. These meetings enable real-time monitoring of recruitment performance and support coordinated adjustments to marketing campaigns, admissions outreach, and program capacity. Enrollment and marketing strategies are intentionally aligned with institutional priorities related to affordability, innovation, and workforce readiness, with targeted outreach and engagement strategies connecting prospective students to programs aligned with labor market demand.

NLU's enrollment strategy is further informed by strategic growth initiatives, including the integration of teach-out programs from institutions such as Hodges University, Stratford College, and Union Institute. These integrations include the transition of both students and faculty to ensure academic continuity, supported by targeted communications and recruitment strategies informed by historical program performance data.

Program performance monitoring is an ongoing component of enrollment planning. Both new and existing programs are evaluated using key indicators such as lead generation, applications, deposits, and starts. Marketing inquiry data and application trends provide early signals of market demand and inform decisions related to program expansion, revision, and resource allocation. These efforts are supported by integrated analytics systems, including Power BI dashboards, which provide multi-term trend analysis, real-time pipeline visibility, demographic insights, and partner performance metrics, and Salesforce CRM reports, which support the tracking of prospective student engagement and conversion outcomes.

Enrollment forecasting models integrate historical enrollment trends, marketing engagement data, and current application pipeline metrics to support scenario planning and enrollment goal setting. These models allow the university to respond proactively to external factors, such as changes in financial aid policy or FAFSA delays, and to adjust recruitment strategies accordingly. Forecasting also supports program-level accountability and informs planning for new program launches and teach-out pathways.

Academic quality and student readiness are incorporated into enrollment processes. For example, undergraduate applicants with GPAs between 2.0 and 2.49 participate in guided

admissions conversations designed to assess readiness and connect students with appropriate academic and support resources.

Enrollment operations are supported through coordinated processes across administrative units. Admissions manages applicant petition processes, the Registrar oversees re-entry and teach-out student processing, and Financial Aid coordinates aid packaging and FAFSA support to ensure students receive timely and accurate information regarding affordability.

Institutional enrollment strategy is also informed by ongoing environmental scanning and external partnerships. NLU has expanded its reach through articulation agreements with community colleges and partnerships with community-based organizations such as OneGoal, Hope Chicago, the YMCA, and Back to School America. In parallel, operational efficiencies across the enrollment lifecycle, including improvements in petition processing, transcript evaluation, and admissions decision timelines, have reduced time-to-decision and improved application-to-enrollment conversion rates.

Enrollment and Marketing work closely with academic departments to inform program development based on student demand and labor market needs. Recent program expansions, including accelerated nursing and additional M.Ed. offerings, reflect alignment between academic programming and workforce demand in fields such as education, social work, and healthcare.

Finally, enrollment planning is directly linked to financial and strategic decision-making through one-year-ahead start forecasting. These projections inform tuition revenue modeling, financial aid allocation, partner discount strategies, and broader institutional scenario planning, supporting program viability analysis and long-term financial sustainability.

### **Anticipation of External Factors and Strategic Agility**

NLU's planning processes intentionally anticipate and respond to external factors, including technological advancements, demographic shifts, changing learning patterns, economic conditions, and workforce demands. Through ongoing environmental scanning, participation in professional conferences, and service on industry boards and advisory groups, university leaders remain informed of emerging trends and best practices. Insights gained through these activities are shared across the institution and inform strategic planning, program design, and resource allocation, ensuring that NLU remains adaptable and responsive in a rapidly evolving higher education landscape.

To support timely responsiveness to emerging needs, the university allocates approximately \$2 million annually to a strategic initiative pool. These funds provide flexibility to launch new initiatives or make targeted investments in response to market shifts and student demand. Recent uses of this fund have included support for the launch of the School of Nursing in 2023 and enhanced marketing investments in response to heightened enrollment competition in 2024.

The President's Leadership Team and the Board of Trustees play an active role in monitoring enrollment trends, labor market data, and program performance, and in reallocating resources to maintain academic quality and program viability. For example, labor market analysis and student demand data informed the launch of Accelerate U and its short-term workforce credentials, including the eight-month Medical Assistant program,

followed by programs such as Registered Behavior Technician and IT Support Specialist (discussed further in 1.B.). Similarly, external indicators reflecting student interest in accelerated degree pathways informed the development of the Learn and Earn in Three (LE3) program (also discussed in 1.B.).

External market pressures and internal performance data also prompted a comprehensive redesign of the MBA program. During the 2023–2024 Annual Program Review, multi-year enrollment declines and curriculum misalignment with market expectations were identified as significant risks to program viability. In response, the university enacted a series of strategic changes beginning in 2023–2024, including reducing the program from 39 to 30 semester hours, eliminating under-enrolled concentrations, and refocusing the curriculum on core business competencies. New completion pathways were introduced to better meet student needs, including a five-term option, a 12-month accelerated pathway, a low-residency Chicago-based format, and a \$12,000 fully online MBA to expand access for working professionals.

The redesigned MBA curriculum now begins with gateway courses emphasizing leadership, critical thinking, and research skills, progresses through core business disciplines, and culminates in a capstone experience. These changes resulted in significant improvements in both enrollment and outcomes. Following the relaunch, MBA enrollment increased from 83 students in 2022–2023 to 218 students in 2023–2024, representing a 163% increase and the largest MBA cohort in the program's history. Graduate employment outcomes also improved, with employment rates rising from 89% to 100%, and the program consistently meeting or exceeding learning outcome benchmarks.

Together, these examples illustrate NLU's capacity for strategic agility, using external data, internal assessment, and leadership oversight to adapt academic offerings, reallocate resources, and strengthen institutional sustainability while remaining aligned with mission and student needs.

Through these integrated planning, monitoring, assessment, and budgeting processes, NLU maintains a mature closed-loop system of continuous improvement. Strategic priorities are informed by evidence and environmental scanning; implementation is assigned to accountable leadership and cross-functional teams; and progress is reviewed through governance and leadership structures such as Annual Program Review, program-level assessment of student learning, Academic Cabinet portfolio health discussions, and leadership retreats. Evidence from these processes directly informs institutional decision-making and resource allocation. For example, analysis of assessment and student success data led to the embedding of tutoring support in high-attrition courses and the expansion of the Health and Wellness Clinic to strengthen student access to support services. Collectively, these practices demonstrate NLU's capacity to adapt, allocate resources strategically, and sustain educational quality in support of its mission.

## Sources

- 1.B. Accelerate U
- 4.B. 4.C. Budget Review Committee - Guidelines
- 4.C. All School January 2025
- 4.C. All School May 2025
- 4.C. All School November 2025

- 4.C. Leadership Retreat FY25 End-of-Year
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- 4.C. NLU Strategic Plan 2030 AY25-26 Action Plans
- 4.C. NLU Transfer Strategy Update
- 4.C. Scheduling Optimization Presentation
- 4.C. Strategic Plan AY25 End-of-Year Update
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- 4.C. Strategic Plan AY26 Mid-Year Update
- 4.C. University Operations Group
- 4.C. NLU Strategic Plan 2030
- 3.D. Hope Scholars
- 4.C. Enrollment and Marketing PowerBi Dashboards
- 4.C. Enrollment and Marketing Strategy
- 4.C. Salesforce reports
- 4.C. University Library Budget Deck
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- 4.C. NLU Strategic Plan Evolution
- 4.C. Strat Plan 2030\_5-Year Report\_2021-2025\_All Priorities

## **Criterion 4 - Summary**

The institution's resources, structures, policies, procedures and planning enable it to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational programs, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

### **Argument**

National Louis University (NLU) demonstrates effective administrative structures that support shared governance, strategic planning, and institutional sustainability. Leadership bodies, including the Leadership Team, Provost Office, and college leadership, coordinate academic and operational functions while engaging faculty, staff, students, and trustees in decision-making. Shared governance structures and student feedback mechanisms promote accountability and continuous improvement.

Oversight by the Board of Trustees ensures fiduciary responsibility and alignment with institutional priorities through regular review of financial performance, academic quality, and strategic initiatives. NLU maintains a sustainable resource base through disciplined budgeting, diversified revenue streams, and targeted investments in facilities, technology, and academic infrastructure.

Planning processes integrate enrollment data, student learning assessment, and financial analysis within the framework of the 2030 Strategic Plan, supporting data-informed decision-making and continuous institutional improvement aligned with the university's mission.

### **Sources**

*There are no sources.*