

Northeastern State University Online Educator Certificate

Purpose

Beginning in October 1999, the Northeastern State University Distance Learning Advisory Committee (now the Center for Teaching and Learning Steering Committee) was formed and charged with developing policies and procedures for delivering instruction. Since that time, NSU's online and blended class offerings have increased from five in 1999 to more than 400 per semester with exponential growth in the past five years ([NSU HLC Self Study, 2012](#)). While this growth reflects increasing student interest in accessing educational opportunities beyond traditional classrooms, it also indicates the care and commitment of NSU faculty to meet student needs and to serve its various constituencies.

In August 2012, the university received full HLC approval for "initiation and expansion of distance education up to 100% of total degree programs" (HLC Comprehensive Action Letter). Given this increase in offerings, the substantial changes in technologies available for online instruction, and the institution's desire to ensure quality learning experiences for students in all teaching environments, this proposal addresses the training, support, and policies needed to meet NSU's high expectations for quality courses.

Definitions

Because terminology referencing different aspects of distance delivery changes over the time, defining key terms used in this document becomes important. The following terms apply to NSU online and blended courses impacted by this policy. Consult the NSU Distance Learning Policy (under revision) for additional information. (*NOTE: ITV which is also a distance delivery system is discussed in other NSU documents.*)

Blended Course – an individual course in which some face-to-face instruction is replaced with online learning. (While in June 3, 2008, NSU's Academic Council originally defined a blended course as 50 to 99% online, currently courses with any percentage delivered online are considered blended.)

Classroom Course – an individual course where students and the instructor meet face-to-face on a regular, weekly basis. Even though the courses meet face to face, all NSU classroom courses should be technology enhanced with the syllabus and grade book available in Blackboard.

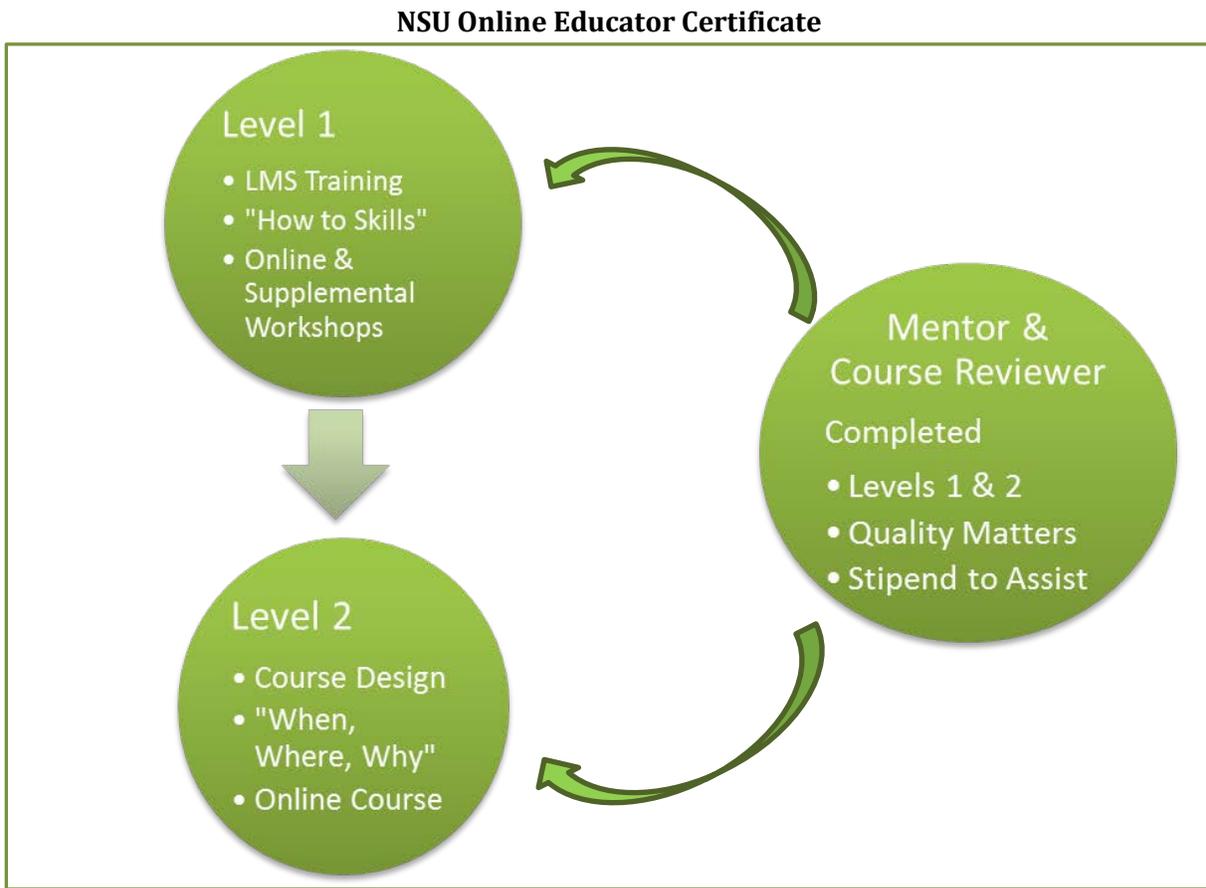
Learning Management System (LMS) – a software application used to manage course activities including functions such as record keeping, course document distribution, communication, learning activities, student assessment, and course evaluation activities. NSU currently uses Blackboard as its LMS.

Online Course – an individual course with instruction delivered via the internet using the approved university learning management system to provide course material, communicating with students, assessing students, etc. NO campus attendance is required for students to complete the course.

Technology Enhanced – use of the learning management system to distribute the course syllabus, share appropriate course materials and maintain the grade book. Technology enhanced courses may also include links to learning tools such as NBC Learn (video bank), website links, or other electronic resources.

TRAINING - NSU Online Educator Certificate

The NSU Online Educator certificate will document that NSU faculty (full time, part-time, and adjunct) have been fully trained to provide a quality learning environment and meaningful learning experiences for those in online and blended courses. NSU provides a two-level training program for faculty with each level building upon the previous one. Opportunities to “test-out” or demonstrate competency to progress to the next level are included.



Level 1 – LMS Training (REQUIRED)

Level 1 provides the “how to” skills needed to effectively use the university’s learning manage system (LMS), currently Blackboard 9.1. Those completing level 1 will demonstrate knowledge and skill proficiency in Dashboard Landmarks, Course Shells, Content Areas (creating, editing, and managing content), Assessment tools (assignments and tests), Communication tools, and the Grade Center. Course tools and resources for assisting learners with exceptional needs and ADA compliance will be included. Level 1 training will be available online with optional, supplemental workshops, and faculty will have the opportunity to test out of modules. Training is required for online / blended instructors and recommended for those teaching face-to-face courses to fully develop technology enhanced courses. Level 1 training is a prerequisite to Level 2 training.

Level 2 – Course Design (REQUIRED)

Level 2 builds on the “how to” skills learned in level 1 by exploring the “when, where, why” to use these tools in online courses. After completing or testing out of Level 1, faculty participants will review effective course design and apply their knowledge and skill in designing an online course. Content for this level includes articulating student learning outcomes; aligning outcomes, course content, and assessment; and designing course content and activities for diverse learners. Techniques for addressing student accommodations will be included. Faculty will demonstrate their knowledge of the principles, guidelines, and best practices in teaching online courses by completing activities that contribute to the construction of a new course or the revision of existing course. Faculty desiring to “test out” of Level 2 may have a randomly selected course reviewed by an NSU peer reviewer using a rubric. Once the proposed training policy is fully implemented, faculty must complete Level 2 training before they are assigned to teach an online course. The Center for Teaching and Learning will offer this training online.

Online Reviewer & Mentor

Many NSU faculty are experienced online educators who can support others in designing and delivering effective online courses. Faculty interested in serving as a mentor / reviewer will have completed or tested out of Levels 1 and 2. These educators will then demonstrate their proficiency in reviewing and providing feedback by completing the [Quality Matters](#) online course, *Applying the QM Rubric*. *Quality Matters* is a nationally recognized not-for-profit subscription service designed to certify the quality of online and blended courses. The program is based on research of best practices and provides a continuous improvement model for a faculty driven, peer review process that is collaborative, collegial, continuous and centered around student learning. There is a charge for the *Quality Matters* training that the Center for Teaching and Learning will pay for those with an interest in mentoring / reviewing. Those completing Level 3 training will be recognized on the [CTL QM Honor Roll](#) website and additionally compensated for their time and expertise in reviewing NSU courses and mentoring new online/blended instructors.

SUPPORT – Timelines and Considerations

With more than 400 online and blended section offerings taught by 62 faculty, and only four Center for Teaching and Learning professional staff members, phasing in the implementation of the credential requirement is critically important. Below is a proposed timeline to begin the process of credentialing faculty.

January 2013

- Input from constituent groups Faculty Council, Chairs, CTL Steering Committee
- Finalize Level 1 modules / assessments, building from existing Blackboard course
 - Check Service Pack 10 availability on test server
- Develop schedule for workshops and online program enrollments

February / March / April 2013

- Communicate policy and implementation timeline – Community and Collaboration Day, February 21, 2013
- Level 1 Course launch (Prerequisite to Level 2)
 - Self-paced / time limited (monitored by CTL staff) - Reports to chairs
 - Modular with test out options
 - Number of enrollees per session
 - Test out only - 40 per session (online only)
 - New Bbd users - 25 per session (online with supplemental workshops)

May 2013

- Level 2 Course Pilot
 - Begin with experienced online faculty to provide feedback for course
 - Revise course based on feedback

June / July 2013

- Level 1 Course continue as needed
- Level 2 Course Launch
 - Self-paced / time limited (monitored by CTL staff) - Reports to chairs

August 2013: All Fall 2013 online faculty will have completed Level 1 training

- Level 1 Course – special focus on adjuncts, new faculty
- Level 2 Course – special focus on adjuncts, new faculty
- Recruit Level 3 faculty already trained to serve as peer reviewers for courses or mentors for faculty.

POLICIES

In implementing policies related to online / blended learning experiences, NSU is committed to ensuring that such experiences, are “coherent, cohesive, and comparable” in academic rigor to traditional courses ([HLC](#), *Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-line Learning)*, 2009) and that the effectiveness of online & blended courses is evaluated regularly. All courses and programs must also

meet the purposes, scope, and principles for online and distance education outlined in the [OSRHE Policies and Procedures Handbook](#). Specifically, the *Program and Course Principles and Procedures* (3.16.4) and *Academic Standards* (3.16.5) sections shape the policies and procedures outlined below.

1. All online / blended course delivery will be conducted through the institution's learning management system. Syllabi, grade books, student communications, materials, resources including embedded links to external tools, student learning activities, and other course components will be delivered through the LMS system to ensure compliance with state and federal regulations such as ADA accessibility. External links should be checked periodically for accuracy and ADA accessibility.
2. All faculty who teach online / blended courses must demonstrate competency in the technology required. (OSRHE 3.16.5.A1)
 - Beginning Fall 2013, all NSU faculty teaching online / blended courses will have completed Level I – LMS Training. Under special circumstances, department chairs may request special permission from the Provost's office should they wish to assign faculty NOT possessing a Level I certificate to teach an online / blended course. Those individuals are expected to concurrently complete Level I certification within one month's time.
 - Beginning Spring 2014, all NSU faculty teaching online / blended courses will have completed Level 2 training demonstrating their competency in course design. As before, department chairs may request special permission from the Provost's office to assign faculty lacking the appropriate credential (Level 1 or Level 2), and faculty must complete the needed level(s) within the given time frame.
 - All faculty will renew their NSU Online Educator certificate every three years to continue teaching online / blended courses. Test out options will be available for those proficient in using the learning management system. Changes or enhancements to the Level 2 knowledge and skills will be reviewed to determine if faculty need to complete additional activities to renew their Level 2 credential.
 - Level 3 Training (*Quality Matters*) will be available for NSU faculty who seek recognition as expert online faculty. Additional compensation will be available for those qualified faculty who review courses or mentor other faculty.
3. Online/Blended course quality is equivalent to on-campus courses in terms of course objectives, curriculum, and academic requirements. (OSRHE 3.16.5.A2)
 - Department chairs and/or program and/or course coordinators are expected to monitor courses to ensure program quality. Supervisors needing access to particular courses may contact CTL to gain instructor-level access. Concerns about course content and delivery should be addressed immediately.
 - Course objectives, module content, learning activities, and assessment means align and facilitate the student's achievement of stated learning objectives.
 - Learning activities are varied in order to provide reinforcement and mastery in multiple ways and to accommodate multiple learning styles. Activities may include reading assignments,

student presentations, science labs, class discussions, case studies, role playing, simulation exercise, practice quizzes, tests, etc.

4. Faculty / Student Interaction is appropriate and allows for both real-time and delayed interaction between faculty and the students and among students enrolled in the class. (OSRHE 3.16.5B)
 - Course Characteristics
 - Course includes student orientation activities and information for communicating in an online course environment such as netiquette, class discussion guidelines, etc.
 - Course calendars, assignments, assessments, and supporting materials are presented clearly and with specificity to facilitate successful achievement of course learning goals and outcomes.
 - Course includes community building activities.
 - Course includes use of Blackboard Grade Center which is updated weekly.
 - Course activities include effective use of appropriate Blackboard Tools that encourage student interaction and engagement. These tools should include discussion boards, wikis, blogs, voice boards, Collaborate sessions, Bbd Instant Messenger or other tools.
 - Faculty Practices
 - Office hours are offered during a variety of time frames and are available each week. Synchronous office hours are available using tools such as Blackboard IM, Collaborate, Skype or phone with faculty immediately. The number of online office hours is proportional to the online teaching load with full time equaling eight online hours per week.
 - Faculty are “in the course” regularly, at least five days every week. Students are informed when the faculty schedule requires deviation from this policy.
 - Faculty are responsive to student contacts and respond to emails and student questions within 24 hours. Students are informed when the faculty schedule requires deviation from this policy.
 - Student participation is monitored regularly, and students are contacted through appropriate means (multiple attempts, various media) when their course involvement diminishes. Assistance and referrals to NSU’s Student Academic Success Center, Smarthinking and tutoring services, counseling services, or other resources are offered as needed.
 - Student Behaviors
 - Students access the course frequently and in multiple areas including the homepage, calendar, assignment pages, discussion boards, etc.
 - Student contributions to course are substantial and suggest active and engaged learning based on carefully designed course activities including class discussions, assignments, and other activities throughout the entire course.
 - Student course interactions (discussion boards, wikis, course activities) are substantive enough to equal the number of credit hours the course bears.

- Student interaction is frequent, positive and supportive and involves both faculty / student as well as student/ student interaction. These interactions are characterized by respect and civility and monitored by faculty.
5. Academic Integrity of student course work and credibility of credits and degrees awarded is ensured by policies and practices which including methods for administering exams. (OSRHE 3.16.5C). Faculty will design exams and projects which minimize opportunities for cheating and utilize institutional tools which provide security solutions.
6. Policies governing faculty evaluation and student evaluation of instruction apply to online / blended courses and programs. Results are used for program and course improvement (OSRHE 3.16.6)
- Online / blended course evaluations will be administered for every course through the learning management system. The first set of questions will be the same as those for face-to-face course evaluations. Items reflecting the online environment will be added to assess students' perceptions of the learning experience in relation to policies outlined above.
 - If a course does not meet expectations, department chairs are responsible for identifying faculty in need of support. Chairs should contact the Center for Teaching and Learning to arrange support and consultation. Chairs and the faculty member should identify specific goals and objectives as focus points for the professional development activities.

Appendix A

Certificate Levels and Module Content

Level I - LMS Training Outline

- Introduction
 - What is Blackboard Learn 9.1?
 - Why do we use Blackboard Learn 9.1?
- Land Marks Orientation
 - Dashboard Modules
 - Tabs
 - Links
- Course Shell Orientation
 - Landing Page
 - Buttons
 - Course Menu
 - Control Panel
- Content Areas
 - What is course content?
 - Creating Course Areas for Content
 - About Content Types
 - Web 2.0 technologies
 - Using the Text Editor
 - How to create an
 - i Item
 - ii Audio, Images, and Video Links
 - iii Uploaded file
 - iv Mashup
 - Editing and Managing Course Areas and Content
 - Linking to Tools in a Course Area
- Assessment Tools
 - Creating an Assignment in a Course Area
 - Creating a SafeAssignment
 - Creating a test
 - Using/Requiring Respondus LockDown Browser
- Communication Tools
 - Announcements
 - Email
 - Feedback
 - Collaborate Usage / Blackboard IM

- Grade Center
 - What is the Grade Center?
 - The Grade Center interface
 - Interaction with other tools and components
 - Accessing the Grade Center
 - The Grade Center Action Bars
 - Creating Columns
 - Managing the Grade Center
 - i Column Organization
 - ii Row Visibility
 - iii Column Action Buttons
 - iv Grading
- Assessment of Level I
 - Module level knowledge assessments using Hot Spot and other objectively scored questions
 - Test Out Option - compiled of all module post tests... can be broken into smaller tests that way faculty can “test out” of modules they pass the test in and will know what modules they need to go ahead and take
 - Level I Course Evaluation

Level 2 - Course Design Outline

Part I - Best practices / pedagogy

- What is learning?
 - Bloom’s Taxonomy
 - Learning Outcomes
 - Alignment of Learning Outcomes with Course Content and Assessment
 - Learning Styles / Universal Design for Learning
- Overview of Principles, Guidelines, and Benchmarks for Online Education
 - What is online learning? How is it different from face-to-face learning/teaching?
 - Why online? Benefits/Advantages to providing online options
- Best Practices in teaching online courses
 - The Planning/Management of an Online Course: Course Structure and Content
 - The Teaching Process: Course Communication
 - Course Assessment including techniques for minimizing and dealing with academic dishonesty
 - Tips from Experienced NSU Online Instructors
- Assessment of Part I
 - Pre-surveys
 - Teaching Goals Inventory
 - Objective tests for each module

- Kubbu practice activities
- Participation in online communication activities (discussion boards, wikis, etc., related to topics)
- Attend at least one Collaborate session
- Communicate with instructor of course at least once through Blackboard IM
- Course Alignment Table

Part II - Application

- Using Course Alignment Table, begin building a course shell
 - Create an HLC formatted syllabus for course
 - Create an assignment
 - Create a SafeAssignment
 - Create columns in Grade Center
 - Create an effective communication activity
 - Create a lesson plan
 - Create a content folder
 - Create a Collaborate session
 - Create and deploy an assessment
 - And more...
- Assessment of Part II
 - NSU QM mentors / CTL staff evaluate and provide feedback on course shell building activities listed above
 - Test Out Option – NSU QM Informal review of one online or blended course
- Overall Level II Assessment
 - Course Evaluation

Peer Mentor / Course Reviewer

- Faculty complete Levels 1 and 2 training
- Faculty successfully complete the *Apply the Rubric* QM course; depending on availability of funding, CTL will pay costs associated with the course.
- Faculty apply the concepts learned in the Quality Matters workshop to the review of a blended or online course. CTL will make every attempt to match the reviewer's content knowledge and/or online expertise for course review, and faculty will be paid a stipend for their efforts.
- Faculty apply the concepts learned in the Quality Matters workshop to will serve as mentor to a peer designing or redesigning one or more elements of a blended or online course. As before, CTL will make every attempt to match the mentor's knowledge and expertise with the needs of the mentee.
- Those serving as mentors / reviewers will participate in all evaluations of processes and services and provide CTL with either the completed review or a summary of mentoring activities to for payment.