

# Online/Blended Course Policy

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## Vision Statement

Blended and online courses complement PLU's traditional catalog of offerings by increasing access to a PLU education and providing additional options for teaching and learning. Blended and online courses at PLU reflect a commitment to high-quality education and emphasize the development of faculty-student relationships, central components of the PLU educational experience.

## Vision/Rationale

PLU 2020 challenged the University to explore new instructional strategies and support the use of technology in the academic environment. Specifically, the university was called upon to "strengthen means and methods for supporting faculty as they work to improve current academic programs, and ... encourage faculty to explore the development of new curricular and pedagogical ideas and innovations." (p. 34). Additionally, 2020 asked PLU to "broaden its ongoing efforts to support the evolving use of technology in our academic, co-curricular, and living, learning and work environments." (p. 35). PLU has embraced new pedagogies and technologies while remaining grounded in the University's history and values.

Blended and online courses provide value to the PLU community in many ways. Blended undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education offerings combine the best of face-to-face and online learning to provide students and faculty with flexible options for a high-quality education. Online undergraduate courses keep students connected to campus and can help reduce time to matriculation. Online graduate courses provide the PLU learning experience to a wider audience of learners. Online continuing education courses help working professionals to deepen their skills. PLU will continue to support the development of blended and online learning options that reflect student and faculty preferences and add value to the longstanding pedagogical standards of our face-to-face instruction.

## Definition of Online and Blended Courses at PLU

Blended courses utilize face-to-face and online learning options in a carefully designed mix of both. The specific format of each blended course will depend on the learning objectives and style of the instructor. Typically, a blended course includes significant online instruction and activities; face-to-face meetings are reduced to ensure the total workload equals a traditional course. A blended course's onsite meeting schedule is determined in advance by individual instructors.

Instructional activities in an online course are completed through web-based interactions, with no face-to-face meetings occurring on campus. Online courses achieve the same learning objectives as traditional courses, but include instructional activities tailored to be most effective in the online environment. Online courses may include online lessons, recorded lectures, assigned readings, online discussions, group and independent activities, web conferences, and technology-enabled projects.

Individual disciplines may choose to further govern how blended and online courses are defined and implemented at the program level. For example, departments may choose to offer online graduate and undergraduate courses during fall and spring terms if they have a strong rationale. For instance, online options may be necessary for accessing certain student populations, improving time to graduation, or accommodating other specific circumstances.

## Approval Process

All online/blended graduate and undergraduate courses must be taught by PLUTO-trained faculty, whether full-time or part-time.

Non-PLUTO trained instructor who want to teach their first online/blended course at PLU must:

- gain initial and final approvals from Dean/Department Chair and Associate Provosts.
- successfully complete the PLUTO program and accompanying course reviews. In the case of extenuating circumstances, deans should contact the PLUTO team ([pluto@plu.edu](mailto:pluto@plu.edu)) at least three months in advance to determine an alternative plan.
- participate in a regular review and discussion of each online/blended course on a three-year cycle from when the course was first developed in order to facilitate updates to course design and technology.

PLUTO-trained instructors who want to develop additional online/blended courses must:

- gain initial and final approvals from their Dean/Department Chair and Associate Provosts.
- successfully complete reviews with the PLUTO team for each online/blended course developed subsequent to their participation in a PLUTO Institute. Review must be completed prior to the first day of registration.
- participate in a regular review and discussion of each online/blended course on a three-year cycle from when the course was first developed in order to facilitate updates to course design and technology.

These processes currently apply only to undergraduate- and graduate-level, degree-eligible courses. Separate processes and policies exist for continuing education and non-degree eligible courses, which are not currently supported by PLUTO.

## Scheduling Process

These steps outlined below will help ensure the preparation and delivery of online/blended courses meets PLU's standards and the instructional method for online/blended courses is categorized correctly in Banner.

1. Faculty should apprise Chair (and Dean as appropriate) of their intent to teach an online or blended course as course schedules for future terms (academic year or summer) are developed.
  2. Departments should refer to the current definition of blended and online course structures and determine their own interpretation of this definition as appropriate to the discipline.
  3. Department chair/Dean should submit a schedule to the Registrar's Office with either ON or BL as the instructional method assigned to the course.
  4. For BL courses, the on-campus meeting schedule should be accurately reflected.
  5. The Registrar's Office will provide a list of all ON/BL courses to the PLUTO team.
  6. The PLUTO team will review list of courses to ensure courses will be taught by a PLUTO-trained faculty member.
  7. The PLUTO team will contact individual departments and the Registrar's Office to resolve outstanding questions/concerns.
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## Appendix: Online/Blended Teaching Resources

1. [EPC Recommendations for Designing Online and Blended Learning Courses](#)
2. [Blended and Online Learning Strategic Plan](#)
3. [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
4. [Current list of PLUTO faculty](#)
5. [Current list of approved courses](#)
6. [Course review process & tracking doc](#)
  - a. [PLUTO course review rubric](#)
7. [Online/Blended Student Resources](#)