

NATIONSUNIVERSITY®

A Manual for Forming and Maintaining
a Local Student Cluster

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WELCOME

Welcome to NationsUniversity—a school without walls! The mission of NationsUniversity is to build faith and to train Christian leaders around the world through affordable, accessible higher education using distance learning.

Students at NationsUniversity generally register and study independently. Soon after their initial registration, they are assigned an advisor, who interacts with them regarding their studies. Often, because of security issues, and sometimes isolation, students are unable to make physical contact with other students. However, when multiple students reside in close proximity to each other, they may be able to receive needed services and mutual encouragement through a local “cluster.” The arrangement is especially helpful in areas where Internet access is financially excessive for an independent student.

Clusters of students often have a common connection with a local school, church, ministry, or other interested party. When a local entity volunteers to serve select students with Internet access, students are able to register, retrieve materials, and take examinations electronically. The connection does not suggest a formal educational affiliation with NationsUniversity. It is a simple service arrangement, whereby students can gain access to the electronic technology needed for the execution of their courses of study. Needless to say, the student may also enjoy added benefits from knowing other students and from study groups he/she may elect to join. Simultaneously, a church, ministry, or school may also enjoy the benefits of having NU courses available to their clientele.

What Is a Local Cluster?

A “cluster” is a uniquely defined group of NationsUniversity students. For service and functionality purposes, NU groups students by a number of variables—geography, language, location, or other criteria. One of those criteria is connectedness with a local distribution center. A “Local Cluster” may be established when a sponsor at a centralized location agrees to provide student access to NationsUniversity course materials. The Local Cluster provides the means by which students, who do not otherwise have Internet access, can complete their studies.

Several options are offered to those interested in forming a Local Cluster.

1. **Full Internet service.** The Sponsor provides direct Internet access. If this option is chosen, the student will have access to all NU courses.
2. **Computer service.** The Sponsor provides direct access to NU material that is downloaded from the Internet and placed on in-house computers. The Sponsor may either provide student access to the Internet for taking exams or may require the students to take their exams online at a local Internet café. If this option is chosen, the student will have access to all courses, except those that require readings drawn from Internet links.
3. **Printed materials.** The Sponsor provides students with printed copies of NU material, which they have taken from the NU website. They may provide student access to the Internet for taking exams or may require the students to take their exams online at a local Internet café. If this option is chosen, the student will have access to all courses, except those that require readings drawn from Internet links.

What a Local Cluster Is Not

1. **Campus.** A Local Cluster is not an official NationsUniversity campus. NationsUniversity is not a campus-based school and, therefore, maintains no campuses.
2. **Name.** A Local Cluster does not use the “NationsUniversity” name in any way that suggests the cluster is a branch, subsidiary, parent, or extension campus of NationsUniversity.
3. **Exams.** A Local Cluster is not a place where students take their exams together and share the answers with one another.

Benefits to a Cluster Sponsor

1. **Schools.** Where an established school already has its own courses and academic degrees, the school may benefit by
 - a. Supplementing its curriculum through the availability of NU courses.
 - b. Using NU course material to enhance the school's existing courses.
2. **Churches and ministries.** A church or ministry may find NU courses and special topics useful in
 - a. Training its members or participants.
 - b. Performing ongoing tasks.
3. **Individuals.** By creating a Local Cluster, a single individual will be able to
 - a. Provide a training program for his/her friends and neighbors.
 - b. Extend his/her own Christian influence and missionary outreach.

Policies

1. Duties of the Sponsor

- a. Those ultimately responsible for forming and maintaining a Local Cluster (the Sponsor) shall designate a Cluster Leader. The Cluster Leader is the official liaison between the Local Cluster and NationsUniversity. He/she
 - (1) Must be a person of integrity, energy, and skill commensurate with the duties outlined below.
 - (2) Must have Internet access and e-mail capability.
- b. Determine the services the Cluster intends to offer.
 - (1) Will the Cluster offer full Internet service, computer service, or printed materials?
 - (2) Will the Cluster charge students for use of the Internet, computers, printing, etc.? If so, what will be the standard fees?
 - (3) Will the Cluster secure books for a lending library? Note that a sufficient number of NU courses are available without the need for textbooks. For courses where textbooks are needed, the Local Cluster may choose to provide these or may choose not to provide them. If the Cluster Sponsor decides to create a library of textbooks, it will become the responsibility of the Cluster to obtain them and maintain the library. It may be that the Cluster Sponsor would prefer to create a small library of good resource works that could supplement the student's course requirements. This is not necessary for completing NU courses, but it is something to be considered. NU will not provide textbooks or other reference materials. If the student decides to take a course that requires textbooks, it is assumed to be the responsibility of the student to secure the texts. These may be available through local libraries, bookstores, or book dealers.
 - (4) Determine a budget for the Local Cluster and set limits on how many students can be accommodated. Make the number realistic. It is easier to increase the limits than to decrease them once the enrollment has exceeded your budget.

2. Duties of the Cluster Leader

- a. Make NU course materials available to the students in either electronic or print form (the manner determined by the Sponsor). Each student enrolled in NationsUniversity will receive his/her own Username and Password to enable access to course materials online. If students have Internet access, they can start immediately. If students have limited Internet access, then the Cluster Leader will need to make materials available to them in the medium of delivery chosen by the Sponsor. Many NationsUniversity courses do not require textbooks and most material is available directly on the Internet. Cluster Leaders are responsible for providing the online materials for students who do not have regular Internet access.
- b. Monitor student progress. The Cluster Leader will be issued a Username and Password that will allow him/her to review student records in the online Curriculum Management System. The Cluster Leader will be expected to

monitor student progress and provide encouragement and support where needed. Cluster leaders play an important role in assuring student success.

- c. Supervise exams. The Cluster Leader is responsible for making sure that each student who takes an exam at the Cluster site takes exams according to NationsUniversity guidelines. Specifically, this implies that the student is informed that when he/she takes an exam, it is to be done without the assistance of another person and without the aid of unauthorized materials. Furthermore, the Cluster Leader secures the exam-taking process to guarantee students have done their own work.
- d. Keep the curriculum current. If NU material is downloaded onto an in-house computer or is made available to students in print form, the Cluster Leader shall be responsible to keep them current. When a syllabus is revised, a new course is added, or an old course is deleted, NU will notify the Cluster Leader.

3. Admissions and withdrawals. Cluster Leaders have the right to determine who shall be permitted to join their cluster. Be assured that NationsUniversity will *not* impose an unwanted burden on the Sponsor by assigning outside students to a Local Cluster.

- a. Students should be admitted only if they possess basic academic credentials (secondary education or higher).
- b. To be eligible to join a Local Cluster, a student must agree to submit exams online.
- c. If students have full Internet access, they can register with NationsUniversity themselves. If students have limited Internet access, then the Cluster Leader can register the students. Only registrations which indicate association with the Local Cluster will be assigned to the Local Cluster.
- d. Students should not register until the Cluster has been formally approved and the contract signed. NU will then assign the cluster a special name and number. Students will need this number to register online. If students do not wait to register, then they will not be included in that cluster.
- e. Each student must have their own working e-mail address to register. Students can create a free e-mail account through Google (Gmail), yahoo, hotmail, etc.
- f. A student may withdraw from a Local Cluster at any time and continue his/her studies with NationsUniversity as an independent student. Likewise, the Cluster Leader can dismiss a student from the Cluster at any time. In either case, the student or the Cluster Leader must so indicate the action to student.services@nationsu.org.

4. Fees

- a. A Local Cluster does not receive any type of funding from NationsUniversity. Sponsors who agree to set up and maintain a Local Cluster for NationsUniversity do so with the understanding that they are volunteers. NationsUniversity does not compensate any individual for servicing NationsUniversity students.
- b. Sponsors of Local Clusters may charge a reasonable fee to students to cover the cost of printing or copying. A Sponsor or Cluster Leader is not expected or required to bear the costs of serving the students, unless the Local Cluster wishes to offer these services without charge. The Cluster Leader shall be responsible for collections of any financial assessments made.
- c. NationsUniversity does not charge any fees to Local Clusters or to students residing outside the United States.
- d. Students are financially responsible for their supplies and copies of syllabi.

5. Responsibilities of NationsUniversity. NationsUniversity shall be responsible for

- a. All material placed on its website, including academic curricula and regulations.
- b. Keeping courses and exams updated.
- c. Grading all examinations and placing the grades in the Curriculum Management System so they are available to the students in a secured environment.
- d. Issuing certificates and degrees when requirements are fulfilled.
- e. Keeping the Local Cluster and students informed of the affairs of the University
- f. Bearing the financial responsibility for the institution.
- g. Providing student services, which include a student advisor (for students with an e-mail address) to work with the students on an individual basis. Students without an e-mail address will be served by the Cluster Leader.

Procedure

1. If you have **read through the Cluster Manual carefully**, you should now decide if the cluster arrangement is something that will serve your interests. If so, read on.
2. **Read the Academic Catalog** for information related to how students participate in NationsUniversity. You may find the Academic Catalog online. Go to www.nationsu.org. Look in the navigation panel, and click on the word "Academics." Then click on the word "Academic Catalog." Read the document carefully. If you have additional questions concerning the formation of a Local Cluster, e-mail Joe at joes@nationsu.org.
3. **Complete and Submit a Cluster Application.** The Cluster Application can be found on the NU website under "Administration," then under "Clusters." Complete the form and click on "Submit."
4. **NationsUniversity will determine if your cluster meets NationsUniversity guidelines.** A NationsUniversity representative may e-mail you for more information. You will be contacted via e-mail when a decision has been made regarding your application.
5. **Sign and Submit the Cluster Contract.** If your application is approved, a contract will be sent to you via e-mail. The contract indicates your commitment to maintain the standards established by NationsUniversity. The contract may be discontinued at any time by either party without penalty.
6. **A Cluster Number (Username).** When a signed contract is returned, NationsUniversity will provide the Cluster Leader with a Username and Password to access course and student information. If you are planning to download materials onto in-house computers, you may use either a DVD or flash drive to accomplish the feat. We suggest you download only a few courses at the beginning to keep the students on track. For undergraduate students, begin with BRS 16.6, BRS 1, and BRS 2. If you have graduate students, begin with MRS 622, MRS 001, and MRS 006. Add additional courses that fit the BRS or MRS curriculum.
7. **Begin Registering Students.** Students can register themselves or they can be registered by the Cluster Leader. NU will assume that all students who register through the Local Cluster will be working through the Cluster Leader and that the Cluster Leader has a right to access each student's information.

The Cluster Leader shall encourage the students to send original transcripts or copies of diplomas of their highest educational attainments. These may be sent via e-mail to student.services@nationsu.org or mailed by post to NationsUniversity, P.O. Box 3342, Brentwood, TN 37024.