

# Academic Principles

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## Forward

As NOSM University evolves from its roots as a pioneering medical school to a university, our academic principles should reasonably reflect both our heritage and our aspirations. These principles build upon a foundation of governance—rooted in the NOSM Act, University Regulations, Senate Bylaws, and guiding policies—and are deeply informed by our lived experience in Northern Ontario.

They reflect our mission to improve the health of the people and communities we serve through education, research, and service; our vision of innovative education and research that is responsive to the needs of Northern Ontario; and our values of respect (including respect for Academic Freedom), Innovation, social accountability, collaboration and inclusiveness.

Our principles are grounded in NOSM University's commitment to equity-oriented approaches, and affirm the full protection of academic freedom, guided by the Board of Governors' Policy, Collective Agreement commitments, and United Nations' understanding (UNESCO, 1997). In addition, NOSM University has committed to the principles of the Okanagan Charter, embedding health and well-being into all aspects of university culture, and leading health promotion action locally and globally.

As a socially accountable institution, these principles ensure that our academic endeavours—whether in the classroom, clinic, laboratory, community or elsewhere—are not inconsistent with the needs, aspirations, and diversity of Northern Ontario. They guide planning, decision-making, and continuous improvement across the university, fostering integration between disciplines, professions, and communities.

These principles are designed to be enduring, while remaining responsive to new knowledge, evolving best practices, and the lived realities of our communities. Together, these principles form the foundation of a vibrant, inclusive, and collaborative academic culture—one that protects academic freedom and is strengthened by collegial governance. In this way, NOSM University nurtures an environment where inquiry, dialogue, and shared responsibility guide our teaching, research, and service.

## Acknowledgements

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# Principles at a Glance

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**Community Engagement** – *We collaborate with communities to exchange knowledge and improve health through integrated networks of education and research.*

NOSM U builds reciprocal partnerships with Northern Ontario's diverse communities to guide education, research, and service in ways that reflect local needs and strengthen well-being.

**Diversity & Inclusiveness** – *We reflect the richness of the communities we serve and ensure all can thrive.*

Diversity strengthens our learning and service; inclusiveness ensures equitable participation, eliminates discrimination, and fosters environments where all voices matter.

**Dedication to Inquiry** – *We pursue knowledge with curiosity, integrity, and community relevance.*

Inquiry at NOSM U is collaborative, participatory, and guided by community priorities, fostering lifelong learning and evidence-based practice.

**Generalism** – *A holistic, person-centred philosophy of practice grounded in community needs.*

At NOSM U, generalism embodies social accountability by preparing physicians and health care professionals to serve whole persons in whole communities.

**Health Advocacy** – *We work with communities to address health needs and improve outcomes.*

NOSM U cultivates the skills and commitment to advocate for individuals, populations, and systems, advancing social accountability, health equity, and safe, high-quality care. We champion policies and practices that improve health equity and access for Northern Ontario communities.

**Interprofessionalism & Interdisciplinarity** – *While respecting and enhancing our own professions and disciplines we learn, teach, and work across professions and disciplines to improve collaboration, care, and knowledge.*

At NOSM U, learners, faculty, and partners engage in shared education, practice, and research, building teamwork skills and broad perspectives to serve communities more effectively.

**Integration** – *We connect ideas, disciplines, and experiences to create meaningful, equitable learning.*

NOSM U ensures that knowledge is introduced at the right time, links learning to real-world needs, and bridges disciplines, professions, and communities to improve care and societal outcomes.

**Planetary Health & Sustainability** – *We integrate planetary health knowledge and sustainable practices into education, research, and care to support healthier patients, communities, and environments.*

At NOSM U, we integrate planetary health knowledge into education, research, and practice, fostering environmental stewardship, climate resilience, and sustainable approaches that enhance patient care and advance health equity for all communities.

**Professional & Disciplinary Identity Formation** – *We support the growth of professionals and scholars.*

NOSM U fosters identity formation in clinical, teaching, and research roles, grounded in social accountability and lifelong scholarship.

**Relational Continuity** – *Sustained relationships and learning across time, places, and people.*

At NOSM U, continuity is fostered through longitudinal learning, research, and clinical experiences that strengthen trust, integration, and community connection.

# Academic Principles (Extended)

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**Community Engagement** – *We collaborate with communities to exchange knowledge and improve health through education and research.*

At NOSM University, community engagement requires a commitment to an ongoing learning process about the conceptual and pragmatic dynamics of communities in Northern Ontario (geographical, social, cultural, linguistic, and communities of practice). It also includes the creation of meaningful, enduring collaborations and partnerships involving all Northern Ontario communities and the University, the hallmark of which is distributed and integrated networks of education and research. Building on the Carnegie Foundation's definition, NOSM U understands community engagement as collaboration between higher education institutions and their larger communities—local, regional, national, global, and specifically Northern Ontario's First Nations, Métis, and Francophone communities. We seek the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in the context of partnership and reciprocity. Sites of learning may include clinics, hospitals, medical practices and First Nations organizations.

**Diversity & Inclusiveness** – *We reflect the richness of the communities we serve and ensure all can thrive.*

At NOSM University, diversity reflects the richness of who we are as individuals and as a collective. It encompasses the many identities, perspectives, and lived experiences of the people of Northern Ontario, including (but not limited to) our Indigenous and Francophone communities, and the full range of social, cultural, linguistic, and geographic contexts we serve. Diversity strengthens our institution, our learning environments, and the health of the communities we support.

Inclusiveness is the active practice that ensures diversity can thrive. It is expressed through behaviours and decisions that seek to eliminate racism, ableism, and other forms of conscious and unconscious discrimination. Inclusiveness requires equitable recruitment, retention, and advancement of faculty, staff, and learners that reflect the communities we serve, as well as the creation of learning and working environments where all can contribute fully, authentically and effectively.

Guided by our social accountability mandate, NOSM University designs its curriculum and programs to be responsive to the diversity of Northern Ontario—aligning learning experiences with the realities of our communities and fostering the virtues of cultural humility, empathy, and respect needed for graduates to serve effectively in diverse settings.

**Dedication to Inquiry** – *We pursue knowledge with curiosity, integrity, and community relevance.*

At NOSM University, inquiry is the pursuit of understanding through curiosity, reflection, and evidence-based exploration. It involves creating, augmenting, and validating knowledge; solving problems; challenging assumptions; and addressing the questions that matter most to the people and communities of Northern Ontario. It also can include knowledge translation, when we move research and evidence into action to improve care, policy, and community well-being.

Guided by Academic Freedom as articulated in Board of Governors' Policy, Collective Agreement commitments, and by the United Nations (UNESCO 1997) dedication to inquiry is social accountable when it is not inconsistent

with the needs and aspirations of the communities we serve. Inquiry at NOSM U is participatory when developed in partnership with communities, guided by their priorities, and grounded in a pedagogy that supports social engagement and shared problem-solving.

We recognize that meaningful inquiry requires motivation, initiative, and the ability to engage in self-directed learning. These skills are fostered through deliberate opportunities for learners to engage in collaborative, professional, interdisciplinary, and community-informed research and problem-solving. Lifelong learning is essential to the career physicians and other health care professionals and to the continued vitality of the health system; NOSM U nurtures this habit of mind, ensuring that our graduates remain inquisitive, adaptable, and committed to improving health outcomes throughout their careers.

Learners are intrinsically involved in a process of inquiry, as are researchers and those developing and evaluating educational programs. For the University to be truly socially accountable it must pursue deliberate and evidence-based practice, which in turn must be approached in the spirit of inquiry and maintenance of academic standards.

**Generalism** – *A holistic, person-centred philosophy of practice grounded in community needs.*

NOSM University recognizes generalism as a philosophy of practice that embodies social accountability. It is defined by a commitment to holistic, integrated, and contextually relevant care that responds to evolving patient and community needs. By preparing physicians and health-care professionals to serve whole persons in whole communities, medical education rooted in generalism ensures that training and service align with societal needs — especially where inequities and access challenges are greatest.<sup>1</sup>

Generalism affirms that physicians should provide comprehensive, person-centred care across the life cycle, in both community and hospital settings, and in response to diverse and changing health needs. It emphasizes breadth of knowledge, continuity of care, adaptability, and a focus on patients as whole persons rather than as conditions or organ systems.

This philosophy aligns directly with the principle of social accountability in medical education, which calls on institutions to orient their education, research, and service toward addressing the priority health needs of the communities they serve.

The importance of generalism and adaptive practice has been increasingly recognized across medical schools, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which underscored the critical need for flexibility, integrated practice, and system-wide responsiveness.

**Health Advocacy** – *We champion policies and practices that improve health equity and quality access for Northern Ontario communities in ways that enhance social and population health and patient safety, including clinical care and public health.*

Health Advocate "As Health Advocates, physicians contribute their expertise and influence as they work with communities or patient populations to improve health. They work with those they serve to determine and understand needs, speak on behalf of others when required and support the mobilization of resources to effect

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<sup>1</sup> AFMC report (2020) identified generalism as one of the top two priorities in medical education. [CMES 2020: Complete Report](#)

change."<sup>2</sup> Health advocacy is also an academic principle for other health professions and disciplines and is protected and indeed encouraged by respect for academic freedom.

**Interprofessionalism & Interdisciplinarity** – *We learn, teach, and work across professions and disciplines to improve collaboration, care, and knowledge.*

In the NOSM University context, interprofessionalism describes how learners across all programs, while respecting and enhancing our own professions and disciplines, learn with, from, and about each other as developing and practicing health care professionals. It also applies to collaborative care delivery, elements of research, and the provision and uptake of continuing health professional education. The Canadian Interprofessional Health Collaborative (CIHC) defines interprofessional education as: “*When two or more professions learn with, from and about each other to improve collaboration and the quality of care.*” (CIHC, 2025)

The Interprofessional Care Strategic Implementation Planning Committee of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care further describes interprofessional care as: “*The provision of comprehensive health services to patients by multiple health caregivers, who work collaboratively to deliver quality care within and across settings.*”<sup>3</sup>

Interdisciplinarity refers to the practice of combining knowledge, expertise, and techniques from different disciplines within the clinical, medical, and human sciences in research and education. This approach enhances learning, broadens perspectives, and advances knowledge across programs and disciplines.

**Integration** – *We connect ideas, disciplines, and experiences to create meaningful, equitable learning.*

At NOSM University, integration is informed by our unique history, context, and relationships. As a distributed, socially accountable medical university, we understand integration as the intentional weaving together of knowledge, perspectives, and experiences across disciplines, professions, cultures, communities, and stages of professional growth.

In our curriculum, integration means ensuring that the right material is introduced at the right time, supporting equitable and continuous learning pathways from undergraduate through postgraduate to continuing professional development. It guides learners to connect concepts across domains, examine challenges from multiple perspectives—including Indigenous, Francophone and community-informed worldviews—and apply these insights to real-world decision-making and professional practice.

Integration also means fostering collaboration across the University and with our communities, enabling professional, disciplinary, interprofessional and interdisciplinary learning that prepares graduates for team-based care. By aligning teaching, research, and service, and by engaging partners from across Northern Ontario and beyond, we create opportunities that bridge classroom learning, clinical experience, and community health priorities—strengthening continuity of learning, continuity of care, and ultimately improving patient and societal outcomes.

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<sup>2</sup> Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. *The CanMEDS Framework: Health Advocate Role*. Available at: <https://www.royalcollege.ca/en/standards-and-accreditation/canmeds/health-advocate-role>. Accessed November 24, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> *Interprofessional Care Strategic Implementation Planning Committee. (2007). Interprofessional Care: A Blueprint for Action in Ontario*. Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

**Planetary Health & Sustainability** – *We integrate planetary health knowledge and sustainable practices into education, research, and care to support healthier patients, communities, and environments.*

*At NOSM University we promote environmental sustainability and planetary health by integrating related knowledge and practices into education, research, and clinical care, strengthening our professional obligations to patients and the communities we serve.*

NOSM University recognizes the profound interdependence between human health and the health of the planet. We commit to advancing education, research, and practices that prioritize environmental stewardship, mitigate the impacts of climate change, and promote sustainable development. By fostering an understanding of planetary health, we aim to equip future healthcare professionals to address the local and global challenges of environmental and health equity, ensuring a healthier future for all communities and ecosystems, while doing so in ways that enhance patient care.

**Professional & Disciplinary Identity Formation** – *We support the growth of professionals and scholars.*

At NOSM University, professional identity formation is grounded in social accountability and the privilege of serving the diverse people and communities of Northern Ontario. This process shapes learners and faculty as clinicians, teachers, and researchers. Supporting identity formation enhances well-being, fosters strong relationships, and strengthens our academic mission. Disciplinary identity formation in research is a lifelong journey beginning in graduate and postgraduate studies, leading to scholarship that benefits learners, communities, academia, and society.

**Relational Continuity** – *Sustained relationships and learning across time, places, and people.*

At NOSM U, relational continuity is expressed through longitudinal learning, research, and clinical experiences that strengthen trust, integration, and community connection.

NOSM University embeds relational continuity as a core principle of education, research, and patient care. Relational continuity is a key contributor to improved health and learning outcomes through interconnected learning relationships and comprehensive healthcare, and encompasses an approach that extends across undergraduate, postgraduate, graduate, and continuing professional development, as well as research.

Relational continuity is experienced through curriculum, patient care, and supervision. In curriculum, it facilitates connections across specialties and between science and clinical practice, fostering reflective practice and critical thinking that stimulates hope and imagination. In patient care, relational continuity emphasizes long-term relationships, trust, and community responsiveness. In supervision, relational continuity deepens learner-preceptor relationships, enhances role modeling and mentoring, and supports intergenerational dialogue about values, professionalism, and lifelong learning.

NOSM U advances educational excellence, reciprocal partnerships, and improved health outcomes by preparing healthcare professionals and physicians to engage in socially accountable, long-term, place-based community-connected learning, research, and service.<sup>45678</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Continuity of care with doctors has been linked to reduced mortality and better outcomes (Pereira Gray et al., 2018).*

<sup>5</sup> *“Continuity” has been identified as a key organizing principle for clinical education reform (Hirsh et al., NEJM, 2007; Cox & Irby, 2007).*

<sup>6</sup> *Learners in longitudinal integrated clerkships report stronger integration into community and clinical environments (Frontiers in Medicine, 2025).*

<sup>7</sup> *Dube TV, Schinke RJ, Strasser R. It takes a community to train a future physician: Social support experienced by medical students during a community-engaged longitudinal integrated clerkship CMEJ. 2019, 10(3):e55-e60*

<sup>8</sup> *Strasser R, Hogenbirk, Jacklin K, Maar M, Hudson G, Warry W, Cheu H, Dube T, Carson D. Community engagement: A central feature of NOSM’s socially accountable distributed medical education. CMEJ. 2018, 9(1): e33-e43*