



Educational Philosophy, Mission and Vision

Mission and Vision

PLU seeks to educate students for lives of thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership and care – for other people, for their communities, and for the earth.

This single statement of mission captures the identity, strengths and purpose of Pacific Lutheran University. In addition, a formal statement of mission, adopted in 1978, provides an historical perspective on the University’s understanding of its core purposes:

Long committed to providing an education distinguished for quality, in the context of a heritage that is Lutheran and an environment that is ecumenically Christian, PLU continues to embrace its primary mission: the development of knowledgeable persons equipped with an understanding of the human condition, a critical awareness of humane and spiritual values, and a capacity for clear and effective self-expression.

For all who choose to seek a PLU degree, the university offers opportunity to pursue a variety of programs of academic worth and excellence. Its standards of performance demand a finely trained faculty as well as highly skilled administrative and support staff. In its institutional emphasis on scholarship, the University views the liberal arts as providing the necessary and essential foundation for the technical training and education in the professions which modern society requires.

The university aims to cultivate the intellect, not for its own sake merely, but as a tool of conscience and an instrument for service. The diversity and variety of cultural programs and personal services offered by the university are intended to facilitate this positive development of the student as a whole person in order that our students might function as members of society. In other words, PLU affirms that realization of one’s highest potential as well as fulfillment of life’s purpose arise in the joy of service to others. To aid its students in sharing this understanding, the university seeks to be a community in which there is a continuing and fruitful interaction between what is best in education and what is noblest in Christian edification.

This deliberate and simultaneous attention to the religious dimension of the total human experience and to the standards of scholarly objectivity, coupled with clear recognition of the integrative impulse in each, is the essence of PLU.

In January 2003, the Board of Regents adopted the long-range plan, PLU 2010: The Next Level of Distinction. The 2010 planning process clarified, reaffirmed, and elaborated on the mission statement and set forth a vision for the future based on past accomplishments and future aspirations. As the university looks to 2010 and beyond, five aspirations frame its direction, its hopes, and its goals: strengthening academic excellence, expanding community engagement, enhancing global perspectives and local commitments, nurturing a sense of life as vocation, and seeking fiscal strength.

Copies of the long-range plan are available in the Offices of the President and the Provost.

The Faculty of Pacific Lutheran University establishes the educational philosophy that shapes and supports the curriculum and programs of study. This philosophy is reflected in statements of educational goals, objectives and principles. Of particular significance to all students are statements about learning objectives, general education and writing throughout the curriculum.

Integrative Learning Objectives

The Integrative Learning Objectives (ILOs) provide a common understanding of the PLU approach to undergraduate education. These objectives offer a unifying framework for

understanding how our community defines the general skills or abilities that should be exhibited by students who earn a PLU bachelor’s degree. Therefore, they are integrative in nature. The ILOs are intended to provide a conceptual reference for every department and program to build on and reinforce in their own particular curricula the goals of the General University Requirements. They also assist the university in such assessment-related activities as student and alumni surveys. Not all ILOs are dealt with equally by every program, much less by every course. The ILOs do not represent, by themselves, all of our understanding of education. Rather, they are a part of a more complex statement of educational philosophy.

The ILOs are meant to serve as a useful framework that unifies education throughout the University, while disciplinary study provides students with the knowledge and understanding of a field that will allow them to function effectively in their chosen area.

Knowledge Base

These four statements describe the knowledge base expected of all PLU graduates:

- A broad knowledge of the basic liberal arts and sciences.
- An understanding of the interconnections among these basic liberal arts and sciences that provide the broad framework for living with the complexities of life.
- An in-depth knowledge of a specified area of knowledge designated as a major within the university.
- An understanding of the interconnections among the basic liberal arts and sciences and the in-depth knowledge of her/his specified major area.

In addition to the knowledge base described above, and an awareness of how different disciplinary methodologies are used, every student at Pacific Lutheran University is expected to develop the following abilities:

Critical Reflection

- Select sources of information using appropriate research methods, including those employing technology, and make use of that information carefully and critically consider issues from multiple perspectives.
- Evaluate assumptions and consequences of different perspectives in assessing possible solutions to problems.
- Understand and explain divergent viewpoints on complex issues, critically assess the support available for each, and defend one’s own judgments.

Expression

- Communicate clearly and effectively in both oral and written forms.
- Adapt messages to various audiences using appropriate media, convention or styles.
- Create symbols of meaning in a variety of expressive media, both verbal and nonverbal.

Interaction with Others

- Work creatively to identify and clarify the issues of concern
- Acknowledge and respond to conflicting ideas and principles, and identify common interests where possible
- Develop and promote effective strategies and interpersonal relationships for implementing cooperative actions.

Valuing

- Articulate and critically assess one’s own values, with an awareness of the communities and traditions that have helped to shape them.
- Recognize how others have arrived at values different from one’s own, and consider their views charitably and with an appreciation for the context in which they emerged. Develop a habit of caring for oneself, for others, and for the environment.
- Approach moral, spiritual, and intellectual development as a life-long process of making informed choices in one’s commitments.
- Approach one’s commitments with a high level of personal responsibility and professional accountability.

Multiple Frameworks

- Recognize and understand how cultures profoundly shape different assumptions and behaviors.
- Identify issues and problems facing people in every culture (including one’s own), seeking constructive strategies for addressing them.
- Cultivate respect for diverse cultures, practices, and traditions.

Adopted by Faculty Assembly November 11, 1999.

Principles of General Education

The university’s mission is to “educate students for lives of thoughtful inquiry, leadership, service, and care—for other people, for their communities, and for the earth.” Emerging from the university’s Lutheran heritage, our mission emphasizes both freedom of inquiry and a life engaged in the world. Our location in the Pacific Northwest, and our commitment to educate students for the complexities of life in the 21st century, also shape the university’s educational identity.

The university aims to produce global citizens, future leaders, and whole, richly-informed persons. At the heart of the university is the general education curriculum. Through this program of study, students begin the process of shaping not only a career, but more importantly a life of meaning and purpose. This general education, in which students grapple with life’s most fundamental questions, is deepened and complemented by the specialized work students undertake in their majors. An education is a process, and the following three components that inform the general university requirements are not discrete, but interconnected and mutually supportive.

Values: The university sustains the Lutheran commitment to the life of the mind, to engagement and service in the world, and to nurturing the development of whole persons—in body, mind, and spirit. As described in the university’s long-range plan PLU 2010, these values are fundamental, and they are inseparable from each other. As important, PLU offers an education not only in values, but in valuing. Pacific Lutheran University helps students thoughtfully shape their values and choices, realizing that imagination and decision give to a human life its unique trajectory and purpose, and always understanding that life gains meaning when dedicated to a good larger than oneself. Located in the Pacific Northwest and on the Pacific Rim, the university is well-situated to address global issues, social diversity and justice, and care for the earth.

Knowledge: An education at Pacific Lutheran University makes students the center of their own education. The best education understands knowledge as saturated with value and meaning, as much produced as acquired. It is a communal undertaking, involving both knower and context. We understand academic disciplines, as well as multi-disciplinary fields of inquiry, as ways of knowing. They do more than organize knowledge. They define the questions, methods, and modes of discourse by which knowledge is produced. Students are required to study across a range of these disciplines to gain an understanding of the ways in which educated people understand themselves and the world.

Skills and Abilities: As described by the university's Integrative Learning Objectives, skills and abilities that characterize an education at Pacific Lutheran University are essential for the cultivation of the potentials of mind, heart, and hand. They are inseparable from what it means to know and to value. They include the ability to express oneself effectively and creatively, to think critically, to discern and formulate values, to interact with others, and to understand the world from various perspectives.

A general education at Pacific Lutheran University affirms the relationships among rigorous academic inquiry, human flourishing in a diverse world, and a healthy environment. Such an education requires first and foremost a faculty of exceptional scholar-teachers, committed to educating the whole student, and understanding that learning is active, engaged, and in the best sense transformative.

*Adopted by the Faculty Assembly,
December 10, 2004*

Writing Throughout the Curriculum

Pacific Lutheran University is a community of scholars, a community of readers and writers. Reading informs the intellect and liberates the imagination. Writing pervades our academic lives as teachers and students, both as a way of communicating what we learn and as a means of shaping thoughts and ideas.

All faculty members share the responsibility for improving the literacy of their students. Faculty in every department and school make writing an essential part of their courses and show students how to ask questions appropriate to the kinds of reading done in their fields. Students write both formal papers and reports and informal notes and essays in order to master the content and methods of the various disciplines. They are encouraged to prepare important papers in multiple drafts.

Philosophy of Student Conduct

PLU admits and enrolls students who possess the capacity for success both intellectually and personally at the collegiate level. It is our belief that each student is responsible for his/her behavior at all times. When accepted for membership into the PLU community, each student assumes the responsibilities and rights emerging from the university's goals and objectives. These include, but are not limited to, dedication to exploring human knowledge and culture while promoting the intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual development of students, and nurturing each student's preparation for responsible participation not only on the campus but also in local, state, regional, national, and international settings.

Once accepted for admission into the PLU community, PLU assumes that each student who enters the university possesses an earnest purpose; the ability to exercise mature judgment; the ability to act in a responsible manner; and a respect for law and the rights of others. This assumption prevails unless a student negates it through misconduct.

