

## Model IV: Distributive By Skill/Abilities

The PLU General Education Program develops diverse ways of thinking and establishes multiple frameworks in support of its mission: to “empower students for lives of thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership and care—for people, their communities, and the Earth.” The program honors the disciplines as the foundation of knowledge and, at the same time, recognizes the importance of skills and abilities in constructing, understanding, and applying that knowledge. By integrating skills and abilities with areas of knowledge, the General Education Program shows *what* we learn is inseparable from *how* we learn and provides PLU students with a distinctive education.

All university courses are identified as to AREA OF KNOWLEDGE and primary SKILL/ABILITY developed. Students select courses to meet the line and column credit requirements indicated in parentheses.

		<b>SKILLS &amp; ABILITIES<sup>1</sup></b>						
		Creative Expression	Computation	Critical Reflection (8)	Discernment and Formulation of Values (8)	Interaction with Others (8)	Understanding World Perspectives (8)	
<b>Areas of Knowledge</b>	Mathematical Reasoning (4)							
	Writing (4)							
	Physical Education (4)							
	Arts (4)							
	Philosophy (4)							
	Religion (8)							
	Social Sciences (8)							
	Natural Science (8)							
Minimum Credits Required		8	4	8	8	8	8	<b>TOTAL (minimum)</b> <b>44 credits</b>

**1<sup>st</sup> Year Experience:** Writing, Inquiry, J-term – courses may be included in matrix above.

<sup>1</sup> Derived from *Guidelines*, II.4.

Total Hours: 44

## **Summary and Evaluation**

### **Model IV: Distributive by Skills and Abilities**

**Overview:** This model is a matrix in which university courses are identified as to the area of knowledge (mathematical reasoning, writing, physical education, arts, philosophy, religion, social science, and natural science) and the primary skill/ability (creative expression, computation, critical reflection, discernment and formulation of values, interaction with others, and understanding world perspectives) to be developed. It requires 44 general education credits. Students use the matrix to select the courses.

This model has varied relationships to the guidelines. Some points align well because “the skills & abilities” are drawn from the mission; but others are not included. The model is flexible enough to meet any goals identified by the institutions. Relative strengths of this model include the flexibility of this core. This model can be focused to meet the institutions’ priorities, and can adjust to meet changes. In most areas, the framing language specifically articulates why and how the model addresses these guidelines. This model focuses on skills as the “academic unit of analysis” and therefore, aligns well with the ILOs (II.1.a) and the Principles of General Education (II.1.b). Further, the model was derived to achieve the skills in II.4.a-f and thus aligns well with these guidelines, even if the framing language does not explicitly explain them. Another potential strength is that by focusing on “skills & abilities,” increased discussion across disciplines may occur in the classroom stimulating faculty as university citizens (II.9.c). The flexibility of the “checkbox” approach and only 44 credits required means that it would probably be cheaper to staff than some other models (III.1.a). It might also be quite marketable (III.2.a) to parents and organizations in search of accountability and student choice, but it might not be marketable to the best and brightest students because the lack of coherence (II.2.a) may leave them with a cold and uninspired response to the requirements. However, the simplicity of the model has some advantages in terms of ability to communicate purposes (III.4.a) and understanding rationales (III.4.b).

One weakness of this model occurs where the specific areas of knowledge or skills & abilities do not align with purposes (i.e., attention to social diversity I.4.b.c). This can be addressed by making specific goals. Another weakness is lack of coherence (II.2.a). Though the model is easy to understand, it evokes a checkbox mentality. It treats “skills & abilities” and “areas of knowledge” as unrelated concepts. It assumes that skills and abilities can be isolated from one another as opposed to integrated. Further, it doesn’t explain why both “areas of knowledge” and “skills & abilities” are important to the education of the whole person. This model puts a heavy emphasis on outcome assessment. While this has some advantages, its might be more difficult to sell in a liberal arts atmosphere. This curriculum does not emerge from a Lutheran tradition (I.3.a. b). The necessity of communication across disciplines would require program oversight and evaluation, which could be good, but also expensive. Workshops to instruct faculty on how to be consistent and deliberative in their conveyance of the “skills & abilities” would be costly and would need to occur regularly. A major limitation of this model is the difficulty involved in deciding what course develops which skills and abilities. Course equivalencies for transfer students that are primarily based on content would not be relevant and would not work (III.3.a). So a whole new system would be required for transfers.

In summary this is an instrumental as opposed to a conceptual model. It may well leave students and advisors with a cold, uninspired feeling.

(This summary is based on the longer evaluation which can be found at [plu.edu/~gened](http://plu.edu/~gened).)