

Model II.A: Distributive with Themes

The PLU General Education Program develops diverse ways of thinking and establishes multiple frameworks for understanding self, others and the world. The program celebrates the liberal arts and sciences and engages purposeful learning in thematic areas central to the University's mission. Courses within each theme challenges students to begin to live the PLU mission in pursuit of a vocation dedicated to thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership and care.

Foundations (40 credits)

The foundation consists of a distributed set of introductory requirements designed to educate the whole person in body, mind and spirit and to spark personal, community and global values for care, leadership and service. The foundation melds academic challenge with co-curricular experiences to prepare students for further study within the General Education Program as well as in a selected Major.

Four credits in each of the following:

- English composition/writing
- Scientific Methods w/lab
- Natural Sciences
- Religious Studies
- Mathematical Reasoning
- Physical Activity
- Arts, Music, Theatre
- Philosophy
- Literature
- Social Science

*One of the foundations courses must qualify as an Inquiry Seminar, and two as Diversity Perspectives.

Foundation courses may count toward the Major if department desires.

THEMES (14 credits)

After successful completion of a minimum of 24 credits in the Foundations courses students self-select into a thematic core designed to develop purposeful learning and to encourage students to make connections across disciplines as they study common issues from differing perspectives. Students integrate their thematic studies and place them in relation to questions of vocation in the culminating Thematic Seminar course.

Example Themes include:

- Globalization, Justice & Peace
- Diversity & Culture
- Science, Technology and Society
- Environment & Sustainability
- Humanity, Health & Ethics

The distribution within each theme is as follows, with one course required from each focus in addition to a Thematic Seminar:

Service & Care (4 credits)– any service learning designated course related to the theme from any department or an approved course focusing on care through compassion or increased awareness and sensitivity to individual and group differences. (likely social sciences, could be nursing, education or other)

Faith & Reason (4 credits) – any approved course that engages the faith & reason dialogue or challenges questions of ethics in relation to the theme. (likely to be religion, philosophy, literature, could be other)

Leadership & Engagement (4 credits) – any approved course that provides examples of and/or engages civic leadership or provides essential leadership skills such as communication. (likely to be social sciences, communication, business, or education, could be other)

Thematic Seminar – (2 credits) a culminating experience designed to provide a forum for the integration of thematic courses with both foundational knowledge and the major program (stand alone seminar, unique from Major seminar, responsibility distributed across campus).

Total Hours: 54

MODEL II.B: Distributive with Themes

The PLU General Education Program develops diverse ways of thinking and establishes multiple frameworks for understanding self, others and the world. The program celebrates the liberal arts and sciences and engages purposeful learning in thematic areas central to the University's mission. Courses within each theme challenges students to begin to live the PLU mission in pursuit of a vocation dedicated to thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership and care.

Foundations (28 credits)

The foundation consists of a carefully crafted set of introductory requirements designed to educate the whole person in body, mind and spirit and to spark personal, community and global values for care, leadership and service. The foundation melds academic challenge with co-curricular experiences to prepare students for further study within the General Education Program as well as in a selected Major.

Four credits in each of the following*:

- English composition/writing
- Natural Science
- Religious Studies
- Philosophy
- Mathematics
- Physical Activity
- Fine Arts

*The Foundation aims to teach skills in communication (written and oral) and critical inquiry, challenge students to ask "big enough questions," pursue questions of faith and vocation and develop care for self. When possible the Foundation courses should be completed in the first year.

THEMES (22 credits)

After successful completion of a minimum of 12 credits in the Foundations courses students self-select into a thematic core designed to develop purposeful learning and to encourage students to make connections across disciplines as they study common issues from differing perspectives. Students integrate their thematic studies and place them in relation to questions of vocation in the culminating Thematic Seminar course.

Example Themes include:

- Globalization, Justice & Peace
- Diversity & Culture
- Science, Technology and Society
- Environment & Sustainability
- Humanity, Health & Ethics

The distribution within each theme is as follows, with one course required from each focus area in addition to a Thematic Seminar:

- Service & Care – any service learning designated course related to the theme from any department or an approved course focusing on care through compassion or increased awareness and sensitivity to individual and group differences. (likely social sciences, nursing, education, could be other)
- Faith & Reason – any approved course that engages the faith & reason dialogue or challenges questions of ethics in relation to the theme. (likely religion, philosophy, literature, could be other)
- Leadership & Engagement – any approved course that provides examples of and/or engages civic leadership or provides essential leadership skills such as communication. (likely communication, business, political science, could be other)
- Scientific Perspectives – any approved course that engages scientific inquiry and relates to the theme (likely natural sciences, psychology, could be other)
- World Cultures/Cross Cultural Studies – any off-campus courses or other approved with a cross-cultural perspective related to theme (likely social sciences and off-campus courses).
- Thematic Seminar (2 credits) – a culminating experience designed to provide a forum for the integration of thematic courses with both foundational knowledge and the major program (stand alone seminar, unique from Major seminar).

Total Hours: 50

Summary and Evaluation

Model II A and B: Distributive with Themes

Overview: The student begins with a “foundation” that consists of a distributed set of introductory requirements across a variety of disciplines (akin to our current Core I). After a certain fraction of these foundation courses are completed, the student embarks on a thematic concentration, which allows him/her the freedom to be relatively unconstrained by strict requirements. Themes ensure that a certain coherence is maintained, by allowing students to take general education courses that cluster in an area of interest. The two versions of the model differ mainly in the fraction of the overall general education courses that are devoted to Foundations (40 credits in A, 28 in the B) vs. those that are devoted to Themes (14 in A, 22 in B). This entire model is high in credit hours and if careful (and time-consuming) oversight is not conducted, the intentionality within each theme could be lost, leaving a mismatch of random courses with little thematic consistency.

Overall, this model aligns with elements of the first guideline, Institutional Heritage and Mission, at an average to above average level. Its articulation with the guidelines rates about average.

--Relative strengths include attention to large questions of value and meaning (I.1.b) and concern for the whole person through the inclusion of physical activity, religion, artistic endeavors etc. (I.1.d). The “Themes” and accompanying focus areas are a particular strength, as they are strongly tied to the Mission of the University (I.2.a). The model as presented also includes a thematic seminar that addresses questions of vocation (I.1.g). The attention to social diversity and justice (I.4.b) is also strong because of the diversity perspectives requirement and the capability of choosing a theme such as “Globalization, Justice and Peace.” An emphasis on the importance of the liberal arts and sciences (I.1.e) is present in the Foundation courses, which are all taught within disciplines.

--Relative weaknesses that this model shares with many other models include the fact that some elements are not clear or obvious and would be subject to programmatic intentionality and oversight. For example, academic rigor (I.1.a) is assumed in that faculty teach within their disciplines and bring their expertise to bear on the course and content, however, this is impossible to assess in any model without programmatic evaluation. It is not clear in the model itself how it “emerges from” or is “congruent with” the tradition of Lutheran Higher Education (I.3.a, I.3.b). Finally, there is no alignment or articulation relative to acknowledging location in the Pacific Northwest (1.5.a).

Overall this model aligns with elements of the second guideline, Academic and Curricular, at an average to above average level. With respect to its articulation with the guidelines, it rates about average.

--Relative strengths include how the Themes and focus areas provide a great deal of curricular coherence (II.2.a), as compared to other models. A thematic approach makes it possible to include a clear rationale (II.3.a). Some of the example themes/focus areas are particularly strong in attending to the discernment and formulation of values (II.4.d) and to understanding the world from various perspectives (II.4.f). The model as a whole analyzes the same issues from different perspectives, so it presumably pays attention to clear and creative expression (II.4.a), critical reflection (II.4.c), and interaction with others (II.4.e).

--A relative weakness this model shares with many other models includes a failure to embody the J-term rationale (II.1.c).

Overall this model aligns with elements of the third Practical guideline, at a below average level.

--Relative strengths include how a thematic approach gives the students a perceived choice, letting students tailor their program around something that they care about. This coherence adds to the model’s marketability and attractiveness (III.2.a).

--Relative weaknesses include a much more unpredictable demand on resources. For example, the distribution of themes chosen by students is unpredictable, and may vary wildly over the span of, say, several years. This model will have more scheduling issues, which means it does not meet the “financially responsible” guideline (III.1.a). The oversight needs are high (III.6.a). To name several examples, who will determine and then who will certify under what focus area or theme a course should be slotted? Who will ensure that students are selecting Themes after the required Foundation courses are completed? Providing for transfer entry is also very difficult (III.3.a). For example, will transfer courses be slotted into themes and into focus areas, or they will not be allowed to count for Themes? These problems are serious enough that we conclude that switching general education at PLU to this model may not be practical.

(This summary is based on the longer evaluations which can be found at plu.edu/~gened.)