

## PROPOSALS FOR PLU'S GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM – AN UPDATE

Who We Are and Where We Are

November 2, 2007

Who We Are: The Principles of General Education and the Guidelines for a General Education Program at PLU communicate important aspects of who we are. Both of these documents were adopted by the faculty, draw extensively on the work of PLU 2000, PLU 2010, and the Integrated Learning Objectives (ILOs) and thus articulate our shared commitments to, and understandings of, general education at PLU. With the conversion of the International Core to the International Honors Program, we have further clarified what we hope to deliver to our students.

We are a faculty deeply and passionately engaged in our disciplines. This is an affirmation of our history, mission, and commitment to excellent scholarship and teaching. This commitment and orientation was also confirmed by the Faculty Assembly last May as the distributive and distributive with embedded themes approaches were selected for further development and consideration. The Ad Hoc Committee on General Education has worked diligently in pursuing specific plans within these general approaches. In doing so, the committee has recognized some important and serious realities that have significantly and appropriately impacted the focus of our work. As a community, we must develop a pan-university understanding of what makes a general education course a general education course. We need faculty development and overt conversation around the various pedagogical approaches employed by various disciplines and courses. We need a fuller understanding of Senior Seminars and how these critical experiences serve to pull together our students' entire educations. We need to be respectful of how the implementation and administration of a program impact our resources.

In the process of uncovering, sharing, and seeking understanding around these types of issues, the committee has recognized untapped potential and undiscovered realities already present in our current GURs. General education needs ongoing and sustained attention. Much remains possible for a program with strong oversight and efforts at assessment that are supported by faculty development and that inform ongoing improvement and refinement. *General education matters* and cannot be viewed as an afterthought or seen as an obstacle to the real work of the major. Academic units must be able to articulate how minors and majors build on, are supported by, and interact with general education at PLU. *This is where our energy needs to go for the next several years.*

Where We Are: This four-year process of examining general education at PLU has cultivated a stronger culture of conversation around general education. This is significant and meaningful in and of itself. The deep and passionate commitment we have for our disciplines has been reaffirmed through these conversations, and the examination of general education has not provided evidence to support major revision at this time. As stated above, this is a reflection of our history, mission, and commitment to excellent scholarship and teaching. To move us forward, however, the elements that currently comprise the GURs are for the first time presented as a cohesive program. Further, unit conversations about what fulfills a GUR and university-wide discussion of such matters are now underway. Having clearly articulated a program of general education, we will be able to do better assessment. The development of our university-

wide assessment plans will also provide information useful to ongoing review and strengthening of general education at PLU.

First, however, we must make the move to think of general education as a program, advise it as a program, and teach the courses as if they were part of a program. Once this effort has begun in earnest, we can begin to assess how well we are doing what we say we do. Any future changes to the program must flow naturally from regular review and modification. Therefore, the committee will not be offering major changes to the elements that comprise the current GURs. While this could be considered by some a failure of the charge to reform general education, we must recognize that this is the organic outcome of a deliberate and meaningful process. *Our time and energy should first go to transforming our thinking about general education and to developing our delivery of general education.*

At this point, two draft plans have been presented to the Educational Policies Committee and the Provost-appointed cost committee. The Ad Hoc Steering Committee on General Education will work with these two groups over the next months to analyze and refine these plans. The plans have also been presented to the Deans for their analysis and feedback. Further, the plans are in the hands of the chairs of the departments that currently offer courses to fulfill elements of the general education program. During the fall, these units were consulted about language that went into these plans, and that dialogue is continuing. In December, we will present revised versions of these plans, including revised framing language, to the entire PLU community. We will hold open forums in January and February to gather more feedback and make further revisions. It is still our plan to bring a motion before the Faculty Assembly at the March 2008 meeting.

Conclusion: We would like to see the PLU community embrace a cohesive general education program and invest in ongoing conversation about the goals, objectives, and pedagogies appropriate to the various elements. Our proposals focus primarily on changes in the articulation and explanation of the program. We believe this is a significant and vitally important step forward for PLU. We also propose a few changes to the elements of the general education program. It is our sincerest hope that we will all continue what has truly become a strong campus-wide conversation about general education—its goals, its contribution to the overall PLU education, and its specific relationship to all of the majors and minors we offer.