

## **“Pedagogy and Persona in a Globally Focused University”**

Provost’s Address

Fall Conference

August 29, 2007

### **INTRODUCTION**

My comments this morning are entitled “Pedagogy and Persona in a Globally Focused University.” I want to start with a brief acknowledgment, do a quick reflection on the year past, and then turn to the heart of the matter, some thoughts on the question: What does it take for PLU as a globally focused, 21st-century university to have a flourishing academic culture?

### **A WORD OF THANKS**

I want to begin this morning by saying “thank you.” Thank you. -- Thank you faculty, staff, and administrative colleagues who provided me information, wisdom, insight, probing questions, pointed criticism, candid perspectives on issues, moral support and large doses of healing laughter during the past year. Your “buckets of patience” and seemingly bottomless generosity of spirit eased my transition into the role of provost. I am deeply grateful to all of you.

### **A BRIEF LOOK BACK**

When I accepted the position of acting provost I identified three primary goals:

1. First, to help PLU become a more vibrant academic community
  - a. By helping to make the invisible visible – especially intellectual work-- teaching and learning and scholarly/creative endeavor

- b. By being deliberate in welcoming so many new faculty and staff into our midst – thinking about the nature and vitality of our culture in a time of transition
  - c. By facilitating leadership within the academic sector for the accreditation self-study. And, encouraging all of us to understand the accreditation process as an opportunity to pause and reflect that will help us be stronger and will help us fold new faculty and staff into the “PLU story.”
  - d. By supporting the General Education Review process
  - e. And by thinking about faculty and staff development through a central question: how do we develop and support sustainable, pedagogically robust, intellectually vital, institutionally engaged lives across the career span?
2. Second, to strengthen the academic culture of the university.
- a. By providing and securing more opportunities for faculty and staff development
  - b. By promoting conversations about pedagogy -- serious conversations about pedagogy across disciplines and across curricular and co-curricular activities as a means of strengthening PLU as an environment that supports the education and development of whole persons.
  - c. By encouraging curricular and programmatic developments that advance the goals of PLU 2010.
3. Third, to work with colleagues in all sectors of the university to provide procedural systems that better support people and their work

- a. By considering how to improve information flow and access to information resources in an increasingly electronic media world
- b. And by reviewing, revising, and creating policies and procedures in the academic sector

Looking back on my three initial large goals one year later, I continue to think that they are sound, that they speak to crucial issues in the life of the academic division at PLU. Equally if not more important, the designated leaders in the academic sector—deans, department and program chairs, and heads of key faculty committees, share that sense. (Alignment between the perspective of academic leaders in the trenches and the chief academic officer of the university on just what the significant issues are is a good thing.) Hence you find these large goals embedded in both the Academic Affairs Division Initiatives and University Initiatives for 2007-2008.

With the cooperation and collaboration of colleagues at all levels, positive steps, some quite modest, others larger, have been taken toward achieving these goals. General Education review is moving forward. New faculty orientation continues to be refined and strengthened. Faculty development opportunities are being expanded and a draft of a comprehensive faculty development plan is nearly complete. Recommendations from the strategic plan for Students-Faculty Research and Creative Projects are being enacted. The institutionalization of Wild Hope continues, advancing PLU's vocational/purposeful learning agenda. International education and study away are growing. The accreditation self-study process is on track. The First-Year Experience Program Committee is a touchstone for collaboration between the faculty and student affairs staff on welcoming new students into the university and supporting them in that transition. Finally, during

the past year people from an array of offices--Academic Advising, Registrar, Institutional Research, Library and Information Technology, University Communications, Development and more have met to discuss a variety of issues and projects, from facilitating the creation and easier maintenance of effective web pages for departments and programs to refining Academic Program Contract forms and the procedures for tracking majors and minors. I am grateful for the cooperation, wisdom and plain good sense of everyone who has contributed to these conversations and projects and to the many that I have not enumerated here.

I have had the singular good fortune of entering the provost's office with a perfect storm of superb faculty leadership around me and with capable and committed staff across the academic sector of the university. I knew before I became provost, but know in a much more detailed and nuanced way now, how dedicated PLU's staff and administrators are to supporting faculty in their teaching, their scholarship, and their professional lives. Much goes on behind the scene that advances the university's mission by supporting us in our vocations as teacher-scholars-university citizens.

### **THE HEART OF THE MATTER – PEDAGOGY AND PERSONA IN A GLOBALLY FOCUSED UNIVERSITY**

I am keenly aware that lists of initiatives, projects such as general education review or preparing the accreditation self-study or formulating a university-wide assessment plan, and even faculty development opportunities can seem like too many and too much—additional tasks on top of teaching and advising, scholarly/professional involvement, and university citizenship responsibilities. When enumerated serially they

can strike the eye or ear as a “to-do” list of seemingly disjointed tasks. They are not. They are essential work in our being a globally focused, 21st-century university.

In my remaining time this morning I want to reframe the list of projects by placing it against the horizon of a question: What does it take for PLU as a globally focused, 21st-century university to have a flourishing academic culture?

Make no mistake—we are a global university. Study away, courses across disciplines that explore global and international issues, and events such as World Conversations or the upcoming Wang Center Symposium on Global Health are one dimension of our being global. So too, however, is the diversity in our midst.

PLU welcomes a growing number of international students each year. They bring experiences, cultural sensibilities, and understandings of education often quite different from those of the United States. As President Anderson noted yesterday, one in five of our entering first-year students this fall is a person of color and this does not include international students. We have nearly two hundred students, again not including international students, for whom English is not the first language spoken at home. A substantial number of PLU students are the first in their families to go to college.

As a faculty too we are global and diverse. Some of us come from Europe, Africa, Latin America, Asia, India, and the South Pacific. Some of us are from underrepresented populations in the U.S. Some of us were first generation college students. We bring to PLU social class, regional, ethnic, gender, and disciplinary diversity.

Language, national origin, culture, gender, social class – in these and other ways we are a diverse and global university of faculty, students, and staff. We already are a “big here” place, with an educational mission focused squarely on the “long now,”

(Loren J. Anderson, “State of the University Address.”) (Brian Eno’s essay is available at: [http://www.digitalsouls.com/2001/Brian\\_Eno\\_Big\\_Here.html](http://www.digitalsouls.com/2001/Brian_Eno_Big_Here.html)).

What then does it take for PLU as a globally focused, 21st-century university to have a flourishing academic culture? At a fundamental level, it requires that we deepen our understanding of ourselves, of our students, and of our work. It requires careful attention to who we are, to what we do, and to how we do it.

Last year I raised this theme by borrowing from Harvard social psychologist Ellen J. Langer’s book *Mindfulness* (NY: Addison Wesley, 1989). In a chapter entitled, “Decreasing Prejudice by Increasing Discrimination” Langer argues that our capacity to live with and appreciate difference, rather than simply to endure it or positively seek to obliterate it, requires that we become more discriminating, capable of using multiple categories and perspectives for understanding people and situations. This capacity for discrimination and complex meaning-making for which Langer argued nearly two decades ago is one of the central capacities that the AAC&U’s Council on Liberal Education and America’s Promise argued is needed of all college graduates in the 21st-century (*College Learning for the New Global Century* 2007).

We cannot come to a better, more discriminating understanding of our selves, our students, or our work, unless we slow down and reflect. To put it in language that is part of our *Wild Hope* project, we need to pause and ponder.

Fifteen months ago, when I became provost, I shared my conviction that a major part of a leader’s role is to hold up to people the mirror of their best selves and to remind them of their best aspirations. A leader also points out places of possibility--areas that, with attention, can strengthen a group and help it better align with its aspirations. I want

to do that this morning by sharing my reflections and observations about our work, our students, and ourselves in answer to the question: What does it take for PLU as a global, 21st-century university to have a thriving academic culture?

## **OUR WORK**

First, our work. We teach. To cultivate a thriving academic culture in a global university requires careful attention to pedagogy. At Monday's lunch with new faculty I described us as a faculty that is pedagogically pre-occupied, so some people in the audience may be wondering why now I am urging more careful attention to pedagogy. Let me explain.

First, when I say we need more careful attention to and conversation about pedagogy, I am not talking about discussions of courses to be added or dropped from a major or minor program. Turning attention toward what we teach—coverage, is the easiest way to talk about teaching. Nor am I talking about identifying learning outcomes for students and then assuming that by teaching a course students will be able to demonstrate those outcomes. What I am talking about is pedagogy—the how of our teaching. That how, I would argue, is integrally and intimately connected to to whom we teach and for what we teach.

We do have on-going conversations about pedagogy around campus. They tend, however, to be of two types. Perhaps the most common conversations about pedagogy are short-term and short-range. That is, we discuss briefly particular experiences or problems in the classroom, or with assignments, and share insights and ideas on how to address them. We do this with trusted colleagues within our departments and sometimes

outside of our departments. These conversations are helpful. From them we garner strategies and insight.

The other type of conversation about pedagogy is more universal and programmatic. This type of conversation provides proposals—what should occur, e.g., active learning, student-faculty research, self-directed learning, learning-outcome-directed learning, inquiry-based learning, etc. These conversations too are valuable for stimulating thinking. They take place, however, at some distance of abstraction from the particularities of practice in our courses. These programmatic conversations, because of their universalizing tendency, often elicit resistance and a sense on the part of some of the interlocutors that they are not being respected.

Neither of these types of conversation about teaching can, by itself, advance a pedagogy of substance. A persuasive articulation by each of us singly and all of us together of how we teach what we teach the way we teach it to our particular students and why we teach it as we do, requires more.

What I think we need—and I am making an argument here, is more and better midrange reflection on pedagogy within departments, programs and schools and across them. Midrange reflection begins with particular teaching and learning situations, identifies issues, themes, questions, procedures and more out of them, explores those against both theoretical and experiential horizons, and yields generalizations that can be taken back to improve practice. Midrange reflection tends to be the result when we take the analytical capacities that are part of our disciplinary training and turn them toward manageable pieces of our teaching in a sustained manner (Killen, “Midrange Reflection” *Teaching Theology and Religion*, July 2007).

Last year one of my initiatives was “the provost buys lunch.” Of all my initiatives it received the least response. That initiative was aimed at encouraging midrange reflection. This year I will again buy lunch for small groups of faculty across units who gather two to four times for conversations about teaching the introductory course; for conversations about pedagogies of substance—how you teach what you teach the way you teach it to PLU students and why you teach it that way; and, for conversations about how, within your field, you talk about highly charged, often contested, difficult issues. And I am adding a fourth category of conversation: key concepts that you teach in your course and how do those concepts a) anchor key assumptions of your field, b) connect to “big questions” that students are asking, and c) connect to issues in the world.

Why am I pushing “the provost buys lunch” agenda? Because conversations organized around these questions and other questions like them flow organically into midrange reflection. These conversations increase knowledge of the particularity and differences in our teaching and of what is common and shared. These conversations make us aware of how, together, through our teaching, we create a web within which students are challenged and supported to develop more discriminating, critical complex thinking and imagining. These conversations make visible what too often is invisible—the amazing human challenge and gift of learning new knowledge, of learning how to think analytically, of recognizing, owning, articulating, and arguing for one’s own idea or of producing one’s own artistic expression. These conversations will help us be better at building bridges into our fields for our students, and doing so in ways that will support them to become more self-aware, self-possessed, skillful, reflective learners.

To provide a concrete example—why is it that some of our students do excellent work when we as faculty frame a task or project for them through our assignments, but when confronted in a capstone seminar with navigating material and framing their own project they fail? I notice heads nodding in the audience, so I know this experience is not uniquely my own. What does this tell us about our respective major programs, about our general education? What issues of student learning are involved? What pedagogical moves within our courses—from introductory through upper-division, would support students to better develop the capacities for independent thought that we aspire for them to have when they graduate?

A second example—how does one teach key concepts in an introductory course? How does one identify the key concepts, introduce them, help students explore them, provide opportunities for students to employ them, take ownership of them? These are issues for every discipline or field. What do these moves look like in computer science, mathematics, history, accounting, art?

Every discipline or field has key concepts that anchor it. They are fundamental building blocks. Often, they also are points where the assumptions of a discipline or field, real issues in the world, and potentially, students own questions and passions are joined on a deep level. Can key concepts be taught in ways that better advance students' learning?

We need midrange pedagogical conversations now. We need them to supplement and support the general education review process. Without conversations about pedagogy that reach this depth, it is too easy to be deaf to proposals or perspective presented other than within the frame of one's own discipline and personal perspectives.

With such conversations it will be harder during our deliberations in March to hear differences in professional judgment about general education solely as matters of unit or personal self-interest.

We also need more and better conversations about pedagogy for our project of developing a stronger assessment plan for the university. Rooting that plan in a broad, shared understanding of pedagogical practice within and across units will make it our own. The work of assessment is part of the on-going project of a professional community of educators.

Finally, we need more and better conversations about pedagogy because they will make you happy. They will help you live less divided lives. In such conversations interlocutors may discover or become more deeply aware of how their fields, their pedagogies, their scholarship and creative activities, and their personal and public commitments are connected. When a professional recognizes the deeper, organic connections among the dimensions of her or his calling, the demands of the work are less exhausting. When a professional recognizes these connections dimensions of the work actually can begin to “fund” or provide energy.

So, with regard to our work, I am arguing that we need to pay more attention to pedagogy and to do so in a way that makes our lives better and our work more effective. I am arguing that at a fundamental level such discussions are not divorced from our scholarly/professional intellectual agendas. I am arguing that such discussions will allow us to be more fully the faculty of teacher-scholars that we are.

The kind of pedagogical discussion for which I am arguing is not easy. But if any faculty can do it, this faculty can. I have witnessed and been part of such conversations

on this campus over the past eighteen years. There is far more conversation about pedagogy going on at PLU than at many university campuses across this country. These conversations will advance our excellence and our satisfaction.

I am arguing, quite simply, that the passion around teaching and around our respective disciplines that is a touchstone of this faculty can be more fully and purposefully unleashed through such conversations.

## **OUR STUDENTS**

Second, our students. What does it take for PLU as a globally focused, 21st-century university to have a flourishing academic culture? We must do a better job of welcoming our students into the communities of discourse, practice, and integrity that make up our fields and our university. The more diverse our student population the more urgent, and I would hope, the more obvious is our need to do this.

I was the first person in my family to go to college. Had I not, because of being part of a very large entering class, been foisted as a roommate onto a sophomore who expected to have a single room, I would not have known that one must register for classes. I was not stupid. I was profoundly ignorant. PLU has a much more fully developed orientation program and a much larger system of support for students now than was the case here or elsewhere thirty-five plus years ago. But it still is the case that many of our students are ignorant. They do not know or notice what we assume anyone in a university “should know” or “should notice.” Students cannot catch on to what they do not see, to that to which their attention has not been directed.

We need to help students appreciate what PLU offers educationally. We are not a technical training school. We are not a church camp. We are not a finishing school. We are a university with a liberal arts and sciences core, a place that claims in our long-range planning documents that we better prepare students for professions because of and through our general education program. We are a university that claims to bring the world, our disciplines, and our students together in a way that cultivates the asking of “big questions,” the contemplation of large problems, and the audacity to act on behalf the common good. As faculty we need to help students understand what we are claiming about the education we offer and what its value to them.

Making clear the standards and expectations for courses is part of helping students to comprehend the value of a PLU education. As the diversity of our students increases it is very important that we not, out of a misguided effort to be helpful, participate in inadvertent racism or colonialism or “classism” by lowering expectations or making inappropriate accommodations for students. If the “best a student can do” is not good enough to meet disciplinarily defensible standards in a course, do not pretend otherwise.

PLU is about providing excellent education. Do not cheapen what you teach. Do not discount the quality of what the university offers—an elite education intended to be accessible to all. The university’s commitment is to provide access, not to promise a diploma.

During the past year I was involved in a number of academic dishonesty cases. The hearing panels, chaired by members of the Campus Life Committee did superb work on these cases. Reflecting on this rash of cases and my interactions with some of the students involved, it became clear to me that too many of our students do not grasp the

rules of conversation, critical thinking or creativity within disciplines. They do not grasp the importance of acknowledging the intellectual work of others, a practice integral to all our disciplines.

I urge you in all of your courses to explain the standards and procedures of your fields with regard to academic integrity. Make visible what is invisible to students—the assumptions behind and the implications of the disciplinary and professional practices to which you are holding them. Provide examples of what is and is not plagiarism in your field. Put a statement about academic integrity into your syllabus, referencing the academic integrity policy from the PLU web.

Finally, help students come to understand what you are about as a teacher-scholar-university citizen. I have had students come to my office to complain that a faculty member assigned her or his book or article for a course and the student did not “think that was fair.” Yes, this may seem amusing. But it makes evident that students do not automatically know what the work of teacher-scholars is or how to take advantage of the expertise that we offer. Helping them to understand that work, including your own research interests, especially when directly relevant to your courses, supports their growth and honors the integrity of your vocations.

## **OUR SELVES**

Third, our selves. What does it take for PLU as a globally focused, 21st-century university to have a flourishing academic culture with regard to us, the faculty?

Minimally, it requires attending to our selves as a professional community, being more

self-conscious about the meanings, norms, and practices that are part of the structure and ethos of PLU faculty culture.

Cultures are dynamic. Our colleague, Elizabeth Brusco, made that point quite clearly during her panel remarks yesterday. Cultures involve traditions and heritage. Living participants interact with those as both are affected by broader contexts and factors. I am aware that PLU's faculty culture with its norms and ideals can and does change, and has been changing during my eighteen years here. It will continue to change.

Even as they are changing, organizations such as a university and groups like a faculty, at a deep level have a kind of organizational/cultural "DNA," a profound impulse, (some would describe it as a "myth" or "story") that contributes significantly to its identity and sensibility. Organizations and groups oblivious to that "cultural DNA" get into trouble. Those that ignore it, do so foolishly, especially in times of transition.

We need to attend to our faculty culture. Why? So that we might relish more fully the privilege of being members of a university faculty. As university faculty members we live, do work, and are in relationships that allow us more freedom and self-direction and creative opportunity than is available to most individuals. Our faculty culture supports that privilege. It supports our academic freedom, the freedom to question and to pursue our questions without censure. It supports our capacity to contribute to the future of knowledge, people and the planet through our teaching, scholarship, professional involvements and artistic creations. It prepares us for and allows us to exercise our responsibility for the project of higher education at PLU—providing excellent education to all for the service of the world and the earth.

Now I am going to fuss a bit. What I am going to say is not unlike “preaching to the choir,” but some issues of culture and practice need to be named. New colleagues who are present today deserve to hear them. And those of you here who are in positions of formal and informal leadership can encourage discussion of them.

A professional community includes mutual accountability. We have structured that accountability at PLU, in part, through a system of regular reports and reviews of faculty. Annual activity reports are one dimension of that system. They are not optional. The reason that I could not give President Anderson a firm number for faculty scholarly and artistic productions for his “State of the University” address was because not all the reports were submitted. Annual activity reports are not simply busy work or an inconvenient hurdle. They are part of the ritual of our collective life. They are material through and by which I, along with others in the administration can tell the PLU story and advance the university’s vision.

Similarly, the faculty adopted a system of annual, third-year, tenure, post-sabbatical, and post-tenure reviews. Some units have made these reviews a regular part of their practice. Others have not. Again, these are not optional. I am disturbed that the mutual accountability structured by our review process seems not to be acknowledged or valued by some faculty. Yet mutual accountability and peer review is at the marrow of a professional community.

Office hours – the *Faculty Handbook* (2003 edition) still lists five posted office hours per week for full-time faculty. This is not optional. I expect faculty to have and to keep posted office hours.

Please, do not interpret me as being legalistic on this point of office hours. I am not. You have professional lives. You will not always be able to keep every office hour. But reliable accessibility of faculty to students is part of what we offer them. It is one of the ways that we support students, that we keep our covenant with them.

Let me put this issue another way. Exercising professional judgment about one's office hours and other dimensions of one's responsibilities during the academic year is expected. It is part of what it means to be a faculty member. It is the nature of faculty work that we must make such judgments. Universities are not, after all, widget factories, at least this university is not. However, acting as if one is in no way claimed by responsibilities, policies, and practices that the faculty as a body has adopted, and that one accepts in signing one's contract each year, is unprofessional. It is damaging to faculty colleagues and the faculty as a body, to our students, and to the university.

Being a PLU faculty member is not a two-day per week job. Ideally, every faculty member should have a day each week during the semester for scholarship or other professional activity, a day that occasionally gets used for intense grading, preparation or planning. You have scholarly, community, and professional involvements directly connected to your expertise. I expect that faculty will lecture or consult or engage in other comparable activities. But even the School of Business at the University of Washington restricts its faculty to no more than one day per week of professional engagement commitments. Given the kind of university we are, I do not see how any faculty member with a full-time contract has room for more than one day per week for scholarly or professional commitments and being away from campus, if he or she is

carrying out teaching, scholarly/professional activity and university citizenship responsibilities appropriately.

Those of you who serve as department or program chairs or on faculty committees, notably Rank and Tenure, Educational Policies, Faculty Affairs, or increasingly, Campus Life, occupy leadership roles and are doing work that inevitably impinges on your teaching and scholarly/professional time. The service you do on behalf of your faculty colleagues and the entire university is invaluable. Your service points up the fact that, in a faculty member's career there are times when one dimension of the vocation—teaching, scholarly/professional activity, university citizenship, receives more time and attention than another. That is part of composing a sustainable rhythm over the career span.

The faculty governance system we have takes time. Time spent on it supports our academic freedom and our capacity to responsibly direct the educational work of the university. Our system of faculty governance provides us, in comparison with other colleges and universities in this country, an exceptional degree of power and influence in the direction of the school. I consider that to be to the good, for our students, for us, for the entire university.

Finally, how we compose our lives, I am arguing, is a moral challenge to us, individually and corporately. PLU will not have a flourishing academic culture if faculty treat their work here as a half-time job. It cannot have a flourishing academic culture if faculty members walk away from their responsibilities in any dimension of faculty life—teaching, scholarly/professional activity, and university citizenship. It cannot have a

flourishing academic culture if faculty members abandon their prerogatives and responsibilities.

## **CONCLUSION**

What does it take for PLU as a globally focused, 21st-century university to have a flourishing academic culture? I have suggested some of what is needed—more conversation on pedagogy within and across units; more attention to how we socialize students into the practices and procedures of our fields; and more attention to our faculty culture. As we move forward this year with the key projects in the academic sector, notably, general education review, accreditation, and formulating a university-wide assessment plan, I invite you to engage these projects not simply as “more on the to do list” but as occasions to pause and ponder, as reflective work that contributes directly to our becoming a more flourishing academic culture and to our living more sustainable and satisfying lives. If we can attend to these key projects in the academic sector in this way, then we discover one more thing about what it takes to cultivate and support pedagogically robust, intellectually vital, university-citizenship rewarding lives across the career span for all PLU faculty.

Thank you.

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