

## **Faculty Study Seminar: Developing and Nurturing Meaning and Purpose in the Academic Life**

Summary: In each year-long seminar, eight or nine faculty will meet to study and discuss a variety of matters vital to their profession as faculty at PLU. They will discuss some important historical materials and debates about vocation, various contemporary issues in pedagogy and higher education, and selected related controversies in contemporary society and academic disciplines. These discussions will intersect with consideration of PLU's mission and individual faculty members' academic and personal goals.

### Objectives:

- A heightened understanding of the rich, inclusive notion of "vocation" and of the challenges that PLU students face in developing their own senses of meaning and purpose in life.
- A clearer understanding of the specific contributions that individual faculty and the university can best bring to each other, within an environment of PLU's mission, competing views of what the university should be, and the multiple demands on faculty members' lives.
- The sheer pleasure of exploring together several "big" and pervasively provocative contemporary intellectual works (for example, the books listed below by biologist Jared Diamond, historian David Landes, legal scholar Stephen Carter, economist/journalist Robert Kuttner, and biologist E.O. Wilson).
- Increased familiarity of faculty members with each other and each other's individual work, both scholarship and teaching, and the greater camaraderie that emerges from sustained, collaborative engagement with important intellectual work of significance for all disciplines and fields.

Process: For part of their work the seminars will have a common structure, but each seminar's participants will also have considerable discretion about the particular topics and readings that they will collectively pursue. Faculty will come to the seminar with statements of their journeys to and within academic life, of their current understanding of meaning and purpose in their lives as professors, and perhaps, for example, an articulation of what single book or essay has meant the most to them. Each seminar will have a coordinating facilitator, but leadership of a seminar's specific components will revolve among all of its participants. Faculty will conclude their participation with both a written statement about some concern that has particularly engaged them as a result of the seminar and a presentation to colleagues in their department, division, or school.

Readings and Activities: Participants will select, read, and discuss several substantial texts. Those will include a classic work on the notion of vocation and its role in society; noted statements on formation of a sense of vocation, including vocation in teaching; analyses of students' development of a sense of vocation; and one or more of the "big and pervasively provocative contemporary intellectual works" referred to in the third objective above. The following are possible readings in these categories:

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life*

Richard Bode, *First You Have to Row a Little Boat*

Po Bronson, *What Should I Do With My Life?*

Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*

Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults...*

Brian Mahan, *Forgetting Ourselves on Purpose: Vocation and the Ethics of Ambition*

Gregg Levoy, *Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life*

Paul Loeb, *Soul of a Citizen: Living with Conviction in a Cynical Time*

Tracy Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer...*

Stephen Carter, *Integrity and The Culture of Disbelief*

Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*

Robert Kuttner, *Everything for Sale: The Virtues and Limits of Markets*

David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor*

Moreover, participants will contribute exciting materials from their respective disciplines that have cross-disciplinary significance, and they will have the opportunity to share with each other some key elements of their own individual scholarship.