

LUTHERAN HIGHER EDUCATION AT PLU is a **distinct form of rigorous higher education** that **asks students to bring their whole self to their education** and clarify their life's vocation.

PLU's Mission: "PLU seeks to educate students for lives of thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership and care – for other people, for their communities, and for the earth."

Our context: Highly secular and diverse: religiously, culturally, racially. This Context makes us work harder to define and embody Lutheran Higher Education (LHE) because one cannot fall back on religious or cultural commonality. **It is an advantage because it makes us a leader in defining a thriving, widely-accessible form of Lutheran Higher Education today.**

1. Distinct Form of Higher Education:

- An Education with Foundational Core Elements / Values
 - Differs from State/Research Universities with "value-free" research
 - Uniquely values the importance of critical questioning
 - Values liberal arts as a foundation for free thinking, innovation and service (a liberating education)
 - Luther's two theses in "The Freedom of a Christian" were that people were free and yet called to serve others (both free and servant).
- Our values are intentionally expansive, non-restrictive; they come from the Lutheran tradition of Reform (religious, educational, social, political) in the 1500s

Our Core Elements

1. Critical Questioning of Current Knowledge and Values
2. Freedom for Expression and Protection of Learning
3. A liberating Foundation in the Liberal Arts
4. Learning and Research within Community
5. Honors the Intrinsic Value of the whole Creation
6. Discerning One's Vocation in the World
7. Service to the Advancement of Life, Health and Wholeness

CALLS (an unofficial acronym I offer as a mnemonic device)

Critical Inquiry / Questioning

- academic freedom and deep knowledge
- questioning status quo, received tradition that pushes the edges of what we know now
- engaging tradition and shaping the future

Access to learning for all – a hallmark of the Protestant Reformation

Liberal/Liberating Education: liberal arts = education for freedom

Leadership in society to diminish suffering & injustice

Service as one's call and purpose

5 Distinct Academic Emphases in PLU's Lutheran Higher Education:

- Rooted in the Liberal Arts – LHE has always been Liberal Arts since University of Wittenberg in the 1500s
- Vocation and Purposeful Learning
- Global Engagement
- Academic Study of Religion
- Diversity, Justice and Sustainability: Calling to the World

2. Asks students to bring their whole self to their education and vocation in the world:

- **Students are encouraged to bring their religious, cultural, social values and perspectives to their education.**
- **Religious beliefs are treated with respect as valuable** to the believer; Many people in our world engage the "holy" or spiritual and these are assets they bring to our educational community.
- **We welcome students to explore how their education intersects with their religious identity:** Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Native American Religious Traditions. We also engage these traditions through academic study of their history, beliefs, and current role in politics and society.

Unlike Secular Universities, Religious questions, perspectives, values and discussions of faith are welcome;

Unlike Some Bible Colleges & Religiously-Identified Universities:

- **We do not expect conformity** of beliefs, agreement with particular doctrines of a particular religious tradition

- **We do not leave critical inquiry aside** when it comes to Religion but rather propose that a society educated and able to think well about religion may be a more humane one.

Unlike current stereotypes about Religion: PLU does not equate religious affiliation (Native Religions, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Christian, and more) **with an anti-intellectual/anti-science stance or a lack of** the best, contemporary **rigorous scholarship.**

What Lutheran Higher Education is Not at PLU:

- Only a past historical tradition – it is a living, reforming heritage
- Is not only about the number of religious students / chapel attendees on campus
- Religious conformity or expectation of adherence to a particular Religious tradition

Our Relation to the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America):

- We continue to be in relation to one of the most progressive Christian churches in the United States
- The ELCA’s policies matter to PLU’s direction but do not dictate our curriculum or University policies

Vocation of the University –Committed Education:

(based on our Core Elements)

- Commitment to rigorous education through critical inquiry
- Commitment to developing student reflection about the meaning and purpose of their education

“The university draws from its cultural and religious roots in the Renaissance and Reformation the belief that education expands possibilities for meaningful life and work and for contributing to a more just and equitable society.” [PLU 2010]

“For you are powerful, not that you may make the weak weaker by oppression, but that you may make them powerful by raising them up and defending them.

You are wise, not in order to laugh at the foolish and thereby make them more foolish, but that you may undertake to teach them as you yourself would wish to be taught.” (Martin Luther)



PLU’s Statement of Academic Identity (adopted 2019):

Pacific Lutheran University seeks to educate students for lives of thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership and care - for other people, for their communities, and for the Earth.

We value learning in the liberal arts tradition as a foundation for thoughtful inquiry and purposefully integrate the liberal arts with our professional studies.¹

We welcome students to the rewarding process of thinking with growing maturity about their purpose in life and their career choices by asking them to test their assumptions and to advance knowledge through collaborations with faculty.

We help students to explore the nature of vocation so that they might meaningfully integrate and apply their knowledge and skills in thoughtful service.

We provide opportunities for thoughtful leadership, empowering students to discern and promote needed work in the world through all forms of human endeavor, so that all may flourish.²

We educate students to practice thoughtful care for people, local and global communities, and the Earth by upholding principles of diversity, inclusion, social justice, and sustainability.

These commitments affirm that the core elements of Lutheran Higher Education are central to a PLU education. We offer an integrative education that examines faith and spiritual traditions, develops deep values, seeks meaning and purpose, and supports rigorous inquiry.³

¹ Kimball, Bruce A. The Liberal Arts Tradition: A Documentary History. University Press of America, 2010.

² Rooted and Open: The Common Calling of the Network of ELCA Colleges & Universities, 2018 (<https://www.elca.org/Resources/Colleges-and-Universities>).

³ Core Elements in Lutheran Higher Education. Lutheran Studies at Pacific Lutheran University, 2012 (<https://www.plu.edu/lutheran-studies/core-elements/>).