

Undergraduate Program Mix at PLU
A Paper for 2020 Planning and Discussion
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Mission/Rationale

The undergraduate programs of study offered by any institution must reflect the values and mission of the university; indeed, they reflect the essence of what is believed to be and carried forth as important to learning, teaching, and guiding lifetimes. At PLU, the Integrative Learning Objectives provide a clear reflection of the mission and a framework for curricular and co-curricular endeavors: we value critical reflection, clear and effective expression, the importance of interacting with others, the understanding our own and other's values, and acknowledgement of multiple frameworks. These objectives support the achievement of the mission to educate students for lives of thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership, and care – for other people, for their communities, and for the earth.

At the Fall 2020 forums, participants were satisfied with the recently revised General Education curriculum (with the possible exception of the Perspectives on Diversity element, see General Education and Diversity papers). The liberal arts as highlighted by this curriculum (including IHON as an option) is designed to provide students with intellectual creativity and flexibility that gives them permission to think ahead to new ways of approaching problems and their potential solutions. The Integrative Learning Objectives (ILOs) were viewed as a clear representation of the objectives to the undergraduate programs at PLU. However, some responses highlighted the need to continue to move students beyond the “checklist” attitude of our General Education requirements; others reflected on the lack of consistent acknowledgement and understanding of the rationale and purpose of the ILOs.

In regard to the mix of programs and degrees available at PLU, there is a reasonable understanding that the current menu, while still categorized in traditional ways, has the potential to offer flexibility to our students to meet future vocational interests and market needs. The cycles of demand for majors and minors are often the result of interplay between student need, the economy, and new innovations. Our emphasis on a blend of liberal arts and professional programs provides students with important flexibility in considering their lifelong vocations and career possibilities. Intentionally attending to our already strong array of interdisciplinary majors and minors can provide another important layer to the increasingly necessary flexibility and creativity of our future graduates. The Gateway Study Away programs do this in a similar way.

It is true that many of the careers of our current students have not been yet invented. This truth, again, emphasizes and affirms the importance of those skills and abilities acknowledged by the ILOs—indeed, the students/graduates of 2020, rather than possessing only content knowledge, will need to understand the importance of lifelong learning, analytical problem solving, understanding of difference and diversity, and creativity in order to be fluid and adaptive to the challenges of tomorrow. The roles and connections among all aspects of General Education (including FYEP), the majors and

minors, and the final capstone experience, as well as important co-curricular experiences, must be integrated and uplifted intentionally across the community to highlight the leadership and creativity embraced by PLU graduates.

Issues

While discussion at the Fall Forums continued to provide support for our current mix of undergraduate programs, we must consider important questions that support our look forward to possibilities of potential student populations and their life goals and ambitions of their futures. We need to continue to highlight that PLU graduates have learned to **think** rather than simply to **do**. What are the best ways to highlight in our curriculum that this is a critical difference in a PLU education/experience? What are the best ways to communicate this to potential students as well as our community members? These questions emerge as we prepare to meet the needs of future generations of PLU graduates:

- How can we, as a community, embrace the importance of the foundational education as provided within the General Education curriculum and significant co-curricular opportunities and make transparent and intentional our purposes?
- How can we uplift the ILOs as central to the mission, to general education, to majors, to co-curricular activities? How can we become more intentional rather than leave to chance that our students consistently reflect the critical thinking skills we value, and help students to see the connections clearly. (See also Engaged Learning Communities, Diversity, and General Education papers.)
- How can we provide the flexibility (and the incentive to faculty) to “mix things up”—through interdisciplinary and integrative programs while maintaining the integrity of all of our programs via appropriate policies and procedures for both faculty and students?
- What might be incentives to both maintain current aspects of our curriculum, as well as to consider new majors, minors, and degrees?

These are the key questions for the next layer of 2020 discussion in Spring 2011.

Fiscal Implications

Two of the questions above have fiscal implications. First, what might be incentives to both maintain and to consider new aspects of our curriculum? Could clear articulation of alignment to the ILOs provide an infrastructure? What should be the policy (if any) for developing new programs that support the ILOs and mission of the institution?

Overall, it is important that the university maintain its commitment to the resources appropriate to sustain the General Education curriculum and the programs that support the PLU mission.

