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Standards

Can a university change the world? Yes! But we have to define clear and strong standards of excellence.

2014: A Blueprint for Excellence declares our intention to become a *premier, national Christian university*. Each piece of this bold aspiration is meaningful to us. We have carefully defined what we believe it means to be premier. We have clear strategies and targets to become more national. We have worked hard to define our unique Christian identity. And, finally, our commitment is to know what it means to be a university rather than a college.

For us, premier, national Christian university is the language of excellence. It is not the vision but the means to achieve our vision. Can a university change the world? Not with sloppiness or mediocrity or complacency, but with excellence. To assist us in setting these standards of excellence, we have benchmarked 91 comparison institutions, and we have set targets in all of the categories we believe critical for a premier university. We have a dashboard of indicators to monitor our progress.

We have determined that we must raise the bar very high, and then we must set out with determination and savvy and focused energy to achieve those standards.

But we also know that we are well down the road. We are reaching for high standards of excellence, but we build for the future on strong foundations of achievement by our people.

We are proud to celebrate some of our stories of distinction. These stories and more give shape to a clear and steady momentum toward being a premier, national Christian university.

The Perkins Center for Reconciliation

Founded in 2004, the [John Perkins Center for Reconciliation, Leadership Training, and Community Development](#) is a first-of-its-kind partnership between Seattle Pacific University and John Perkins, one of the important evangelical voices to come out of the American civil rights movement. By creating the Center, located on the SPU campus, our goal is to equip generations of global urban leaders to engage the culture and change the world through reconciliation, leadership training, and community development.

In everything we do, we seek to model reconciliation at Seattle Pacific. Through the Perkins Center, we are building bridges into the community, creating partnerships with urban churches and organizations, launching scholarship and reflection, and changing the shape and face of our own campus community.

Internationally known for his groundbreaking work in Christian community development, John Perkins describes reconciliation as “the centerpiece of the gospel” — a conviction echoed by Perkins Center Director Tali Hairston.

“The classic theologians based their understanding of human excellence on knowing and loving God, [which] brings proper human dignity and flourishing.”

Ellen Charry
Margaret W. Harmon Associate
Professor of Systematic
Theology at Princeton
Theological Seminary

“Reconciliation calls for a coalition of people coming together with different strengths, different gifts, different ways of doing things, to solve the problem of dividedness in our culture,” says Hairston. “Reconciliation is transformative, not just for individuals, but also for the whole community. When we practice reconciliation, it leads to cultural change.”

The Brain Center for Applied Learning Research

What does brain science have to do with education? The question is at the heart of a pioneering collaboration we have launched between Seattle Pacific University and renowned developmental molecular biologist John Medina.

Medina is founding director of Talaris Research Institute, a Seattle-based nonprofit organization that translates its scientific findings into tools for parents of young children. He is the first to admit that until now brain scientists have had little engagement with educators. “The disciplines of brain science and education haven’t had a lot to say to each other — mostly because they live in isolation,” he explains. “If brain scientists and educators are allowed to work together, they will turn both disciplines upside down.”

This revolutionary vision led Seattle Pacific to open the Brain Center for Applied Learning Research in 2005 and to appoint Medina as director. He and SPU faculty members in education, psychology, and physics are now exploring how the brain learns, and the implications of this research for the classroom. The results will have profound effects for K–12 teacher education, not only at SPU, but also regionally and nationally. “What we are working toward,” says Medina, “is the creation of a research environment where educators and brain scientists figure out how to optimize learning environments.”

The School of Theology

As we seek to embrace the Christian story, becoming biblically and theologically educated, the School of Theology plays a pivotal leadership role. One key contribution of the School has been the design of a three-course sequence in Seattle Pacific University’s Common Curriculum that includes “Christian Formation,” “Christian Scriptures,” and “Christian Theology.” All undergraduate students take these courses, sometimes powerful formative experiences in their lives. Shaped by our Wesleyan heritage and taught by some of our finest faculty, the curriculum has received national recognition and two grants from The Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. The School has also received major support from the Lilly Endowment.

School of Theology faculty members understand the synergy between teaching, scholarship, and service to the church. Original research for their classroom teaching often results in presentations for clergy and church audiences, as well as books and other publications for both academic and lay audiences. Recent examples of this include Dr. Frank Spina’s book *The Faith of the Outsider*; Dr. Priscilla Pope-Levison’s volume *Turn the Pulpit Loose: Two Centuries of American Women Evangelists*; and Dr. Robert Wall’s *Called to Be the Church*, an insightful study of the Book of Acts.

The Sciences

To engage the culture and change the world, our graduates must be scientifically literate. The world is experiencing an intellectual and social revolution driven by rapid advances in science and technology, and Seattle Pacific University has set out to offer students the finest science education available.

That is why we have invested significant resources in the sciences since 2003. The results are an award-winning science building, the Philip W. and Sharon K. Eaton Hall, for the study of biology, chemistry, biochemistry, and

psychology; a renovated facility for the study of computer science, engineering, mathematics, and physics; and a science faculty with exceptional credentials, experience, and connections within the scientific community. We now have the largest-ever enrollment in the sciences at SPU, and our students are excelling in graduate school and the professions — a 94 percent medical school acceptance rate for premed graduates is one indicator of this success. With sizable grants from the National Science Foundation, the Murdock Trust, and The Boeing Company, Seattle Pacific is also becoming a leader in new ways to teach science.

SPU not only trains professional scientists and science teachers, but also helps all students become scientifically literate citizens. We aim to equip students with both the competence and character needed for leadership in a rapidly changing world.

The Common Curriculum

At the very heart of a Seattle Pacific University education is one of the few genuine four-year core programs in the nation. The Common Curriculum, as it is called, consists of seven courses required of all SPU students over four years. We designed this innovative program explicitly to connect the liberal arts, Christian faith, and real-life human issues. Coupled with an Exploratory Curriculum in specific disciplines and major requirements, this is the curricular path to a baccalaureate degree.

Students attend three freshman Common Curriculum courses with the same small group of students, and their first-quarter University Seminar professor serves as their faculty advisor. “My University Seminar is preparing me for the higher workload in college,” says freshman Kristin Snyder. “Right now, we’re reading *Bruchko* by Bruce Olson, writing reflection papers, and talking about urban ministries.” Another unique feature of the Common Curriculum is a group of texts and works of art, music, and drama that all students study, and which reflect the themes of an SPU education.

In an increasingly fragmented world, the Common Curriculum helps students explore the connections in all aspects of their lives — and, in so doing, equips them to engage the culture in whatever vocation they choose.

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Founded in 1891, Seattle Pacific University is a leading Christian university that equips people to engage the culture and change the world. [Learn more](#)