

[Valparaiso University](#) sits in a tiny town of about 30,000 in rural Indiana, an 80-minute drive from Chicago's O'Hare international airport. Valpo, as most call it, is a small Lutheran comprehensive university with some professional and graduate schools. Unusually for a college of only 3,250 or so undergraduates, it has a strong and growing international footprint. This year's new international student enrolment is more than 200, and Valpo hopes to have 15 per cent of its students from other nations in the near future.

Valpo has study centres in the UK at [Anglia Ruskin University](#), in Germany at [Reutlingen University](#), at the Universidad de las Américas in Mexico and at [Zhejiang University](#) in China. It is also building close academic ties with Dalian University in China and helping to create a new private university near Pune in India.

The growing international profile is tied to Valpo's goal of developing young people who can "flourish in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world". They should be able to "lead and thrive in a global community".

How do they do this? There is a strong study-abroad component based at the four study centres as well as programmes in countries as varied as Namibia, Nicaragua and Ireland in addition to the usual European and Asian destinations. Students in the arts and the College of Business Administration must meet a foreign language requirement, and they can choose from German and Romance languages as well as Chinese, Japanese and Hebrew.

But the key feature is the "Valpo Core", in which undergraduates pursue six themes that are the essence of the human experience. Students begin with a semester addressing origins, education and love, and follow that with a semester focusing on leadership and service, work and vocation, then life and death.

The seminars also introduce students to basic techniques of research and collecting data through interviews. They engage with materials as diverse as Marx, Luther, Sophocles and the Gospels as well as films such as *Billy Elliot*, on the 1980s British miners' strike, and *Invictus*, about Nelson Mandela and post-apartheid rugby.

In the Core, students write all the time, but not always formally for a grade, and classes are small, with a lot of debate, reflection and discussion.

In addition, students must spend time on activities such as attending and writing about a campus cultural activity or event, which helps to broaden the range of writing experiences. And there are opportunities for voluntary service such as working at a soup kitchen or language tutoring the children of the region's growing Hispanic community.

As well as offering local students a rich experience, the Valpo Core differentiates the university in the global marketplace. It is a mix of pastoral care, academic study and skills development. It values and exemplifies good teaching and promotes critical thinking, close study of texts and careful weighing of evidence. All these qualities increase the likelihood of local and international students graduating on time. No small matter when tuition charges, fees, meals and living expenses add up to about \$48,000 (£29,200) a year.

Yet the institution's motivation is not money. It is tied to its Christian mission of spreading knowledge, mutual understanding and faith, all captured in its motto "In Thy light, we see light" (Psalm xxxvi, 9).