

1.2 THE EDUCATIONAL TASK OF DORDT COLLEGE

PREFACE

Under the supervision of the board of trustees, the Dordt College faculty has written and adopted a statement of purpose describing the implications of a Reformed confession of biblical faith on Christian higher education.

The first such statement, adopted in 1961, consisted of seventeen propositions designed to guide the development of the educational program. A more detailed statement was formulated in 1968 under the title *Scripturally-Oriented Higher Education*. Finally, between 1979 and 1996, *The Educational Task of Dordt College* was formulated and adopted. This document now serves as the biblically-based, confessional foundation for the entire academic enterprise at Dordt College.

All who are associated with Dordt College are pledged to prayerfully pursue the purposes outlined in this document as together we engage in the education of God's covenant people for faithful service in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Carl E. Zylstra, President

THE EDUCATIONAL TASK OF DORDT COLLEGE

INTRODUCTION

The Educational Task of Dordt College sets forth the principles that are to direct the institution in the performance of its educational task.

Dordt College owes its origin and continuing existence to a society of God's people, whose faith commitment demands obedient acknowledgment of biblical principles in education. Those who first showed interest in establishing a college in northwest Iowa stated the following in a report submitted in 1937 by Classis Ostfriesland (now Classis Northcentral Iowa) of the Christian Reformed Church:

That Classis Ostfriesland invite Classis Pella, Minnesota, Orange City, and Sioux Center to join with us in working towards the organization, support and control of a Christian junior college in harmony with Reformed principles. The aim of such a junior college is to give young people an education that is Christian, not merely in the sense that devotional exercises are appended to the ordinary work of the college, but in the larger and deeper sense that all the class work, all the students' intellectual, emotional, and imaginative activities shall be permeated with the spirit and teaching of Christianity.

This biblical perspective has continued to determine the direction of Dordt College:

In the training and development of the redeemed in Christ the Holy Scriptures are basic, since they are indispensable to the proper realization of the individual's capacities and the proper fulfilling of his responsibilities. All education must be scripturally oriented. (*Educational Task of Dordt College*—Adopted in 1961, Proposition #9)

The covenant parent recognizes the school, formal education, as the second sphere vital to the fulfillment of his task. In agreement with his covenantal-kingdom philosophy, he demands an education for his child that is scripturally oriented. (*Scripturally-Oriented Higher Education*, 1968, p. 26)

This religious commitment, which is historically known as the Reformed faith, must also be honored in the articulation of the principles and purposes of the college.

The college faculty has a particular responsibility for the formulation of a purpose statement. The members of the faculty have received special gifts and training which qualify them and make them responsible for defining as well as implementing the educational philosophy of the college. The faculty, working under the supervision of the board of trustees, must remain sensitive to the religious perspective of the supporting society. But the faculty must also lead the members of the society, by means of Christian scholarship, to a deepening understanding of the demands of that perspective. This document, written by the faculty of Dordt College, is an attempt to go beyond what was set forth in previous documents.

CHAPTER I: BASIS

Fundamental to the faith of the constituents of Dordt College is their confession that the scriptures are the Word of God. As God's infallibly and authoritatively inspired revelation, the Bible reveals the way to salva-

tion in Jesus Christ, requires life to be lived in obedience to the Lord, and provides the key to the understanding, interpretation, meaning, and purpose of life. Only the Bible can unlock the door to a true insight into the nature of created reality. Ultimately, all things must be judged in the light of its teachings. Hence, Dordt College confesses that the Bible provides the determinative and essential principles for a Christian educational philosophy.

The Bible reveals to us a sovereign God; all things are under his control. Nothing can exist apart from him, and everything finds its goal and purpose in his glory.¹

In the beginning, the Bible tells us, God created all things by his sovereign will.² The Son of God, the Word incarnate, was central in this work of creation. The Apostle John affirms that Christ is the Son of God, the Word, without whom nothing was made;³ Paul explains that the Son is the image of the invisible God through whom and by whom the entire cosmos was brought into existence.⁴ In the same context, furthermore, Paul makes clear that God upholds and maintains the entire creation by his Son.⁵ Therefore, the creation is an integrated totality, a cosmos in which each part is designed to function coherently and meaningfully.

The creation belongs to God⁶ and is under his sovereign rule;⁷ it is God's Kingdom.⁸ God controls and orders the cosmos by his will; and it is only by obedience to his will that the creation can fulfill its purpose in the service of God.⁹

By the Word, that is the Son of God, a *diversity* is brought about within the creation. We acknowledge this when we confess that God "has created of nothing the heavens, the earth, and all creatures, when it seemed good unto him, giving unto every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices to serve its creator."¹⁰ Each creature is accountable to the sovereign King and must obey the laws which God has established for it.

The Bible also tells us that God created men and women in his image, religious creatures, covenantally bound to their creator by the law which calls for loving obedience. The religious character of human kind is manifested through the heart, which is the integrating center of human existence.¹¹ With hearts open to the will of God, people were to serve the creator by fulfilling the mandate to subdue the earth.¹² That is, God placed men and women in office and called them to the task of working in His Kingdom.

However, by disobeying God, men and women violated their office and broke the bond of covenantal fellowship. They closed their hearts to the will of God and exchanged the true service of the creator for the idolatrous service of the creature.¹³ After the fall, people began to treat the creation not as the Kingdom of God, but as an object of exploitation for their own glory. Having rejected the source of true fellowship and harmony, humanity abandoned itself and the creation to division and strife, misery and death.

God determined not to leave his creation in such a state, however. He came to us with his word of grace,¹⁴ promising to reclaim what had been deformed and distorted by sin. He fulfilled this promise in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate. Through faith in Christ, we are restored to covenantal fellowship with God and made to live again as his office-bearers in the kingdom.

We must clearly see that Christ redeemed not only humanity, but the cosmos as well.¹⁵ Even though the effects of the fall continue to be present, Christ has broken the dominion of Satan, rescued the creation from

¹ Romans 11:36.

² Revelation 4:11.

³ John 1:3.

⁴ Colossians 1:15–17; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 1:2; Hebrews 11:3; 2 Peter 3:5.

⁵ Colossian 1:17.

⁶ Exodus 9:29; Exodus 19:5; Psalm 24:1; 1 Corinthians 10:26.

⁷ Psalm 103:19.

⁸ Psalm 22:28; Psalm 47; Psalm 103:19; Psalm 145:10–21; Obadiah 1:21; Zechariah 14:16–21.

⁹ Psalm 119:89–91.

¹⁰ Belgic Confession, Article 12.

¹¹ Proverbs 23:7; Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 12:34, 35; Luke 6:45; Mark 7:18–23; 2 Corinthians 9:7.

¹² Genesis 1:26, 28.

¹³ Romans 1:25.

¹⁴ Genesis 3:15.

¹⁵ John 1:29; John 3:16; Ephesians 1:9, 10; Philippians 2:9, 10; Colossians 1:19; 20; 1 John 2:2; Revelation 21:5.

the curse of sin and reigns as King over all.¹⁶ From this position of power, he summons the members of the new humanity to work for the expression of His Kingdom everywhere. As agents of reconciliation, they are called to labor together as one body in fulfilling the original mandate according to the claims of Christ.

God continues to sustain all existence through his Word and to require obedience of all his creatures.¹⁷ While the redeemed joyfully comply with the demands of the will of God, the unregenerate willfully oppose them. Thus, an antithesis arises between the reconciling work of Christ's body and the resistance of unbelief. Although significant insight into the created order can be gained by unbelievers, true meaning and coherence remain inaccessible without the light of the Bible, a heart committed to Christ, and the operation of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

Therefore, biblically oriented learning is both a possibility and a necessity for the Christian community. Recognizing this, the constituents of Dordt College maintain an institution of Christian higher education.

CHAPTER II: CONTEXT

To understand the nature of education, we must see it against the background of God's mandate to subdue the earth.¹⁹ God called humanity to the task of dressing and keeping the garden, that is, developing and conserving the created order. Moreover, as God's image-bearers, people are capable of fulfilling this mandate, because God, in calling people to his task, also equips them. Education, in its broadest sense, is an essential element in the development and exercise of that capability.

Humanity's ability to develop the creation depends on insight. Consequently, people must study, examine, and understand the world. Furthermore, the results of such study and investigation must be preserved by transmission from one generation to another. Education, therefore, is fundamental to humanity's task of developing and conserving the created order.

Education also relates to the performance of humanity's cultural task in another way, however. God instructed men and women to be fruitful and multiply. This inevitably involves not merely the begetting but also the training of children. Such training, too, reflects the call to develop and conserve, for children must be trained to acquire and exercise insight.

Education, then, is a constituent of life itself, and in its broadest scope refers to all human efforts to gain and transmit insight, whether at the forefront of science in universities and research centers or in the kindergarten class or on mother's lap. Seen thus, education pervades all of life. It is operative in every human relationship. In marriage, it manifests itself in the deepening of understanding between the two partners. In the home, the rearing of children is essentially an educational activity. In the church, we are instructed in the Scriptures. In all other spheres, too, such as commerce, industry, the arts and the media, there is development and conservation which requires growing insight.

In the course of history, as the human community engaged in increasingly complex cultural activity, a differentiation of tasks and offices took place. And, whereas at one time the authority of a father and that of a ruler were combined in one office, soon such authority came to be distinguished and localized in different offices, in the spheres of family and state. As civilization marched on, a multiplicity of tasks developed, requiring a variety of offices and responsibilities. The school is one of the results of such historical differentiation.

The school is the sphere in which education has become institutionalized, and has therefore been endowed with a characteristically educational task. Its responsibility is to focus on the process of gaining and transmitting insights. This task, however, is so great and so complex that further differentiation within institutionalized education became necessary. As a result, there are today elementary schools, high schools, colleges, and graduate schools.

The elementary school and the high school develop insight on a relatively uncomplicated and preparational level. Elementary and high school pupils learn to understand the fundamental character of the creation and of the tasks that will confront them as adults. On the college level the insight acquired is more abstract and scientific. There the understanding of reality is both broadened and deepened. On the graduate level the

¹⁶ Matthew 28:18.

¹⁷ See earlier in Chapter I.

¹⁸ See earlier in Chapter I.

¹⁹ See earlier in Chapter I.

emphasis shifts to research, the further expansion of the limits of human knowledge, and advanced levels of professional training.

Within the Christian community, education plays an especially significant role today, for the Christian's task of understanding God's handiwork is complicated by the extensive deformation brought about by centuries of secularization. Christians are tempted to view God's laws and our response through the screen of distortions fabricated by unbelief. This situation makes the work of Christian education particularly difficult.

As an institution of higher learning, Dordt College addresses itself to the task of Christian education. It seeks to acquire and transmit genuine Christian insight, that is, to develop and implement an understanding of the entire creation in the liberating light of the Scriptures. Dordt College desires to be an institution of Christian learning for the benefit of both the attending student body and the entire Christian community, so that the Lord's Kingdom may come to greater expression.

CHAPTER III: STRUCTURE

The educational task of Dordt College is to be understood as a calling whereby the Lord summons committed and insightful men and women to educational service. When they hear and accept the calling to participate in the task of the college, they accept and occupy a variety of offices.²⁰ As office-bearers, board members are elected, professors, administrators, and support staff are appointed; and students voluntarily join in the work of the educational community. These office-bearers, endowed with God-given competence and insight, are thus authorized to take part in the educational work of Dordt College.

Authorization to office entails responsibility.²¹ The educational office-bearers at Dordt College are responsible to carry out their specific tasks in a spirit of loving service to their fellow office-bearers.²²

Since God authorizes this educational task, it is important that a sense of office pervade all aspects of the college. To participate in the work of developing and transmitting insight is not merely an occupation or a means to gain financial security or self esteem, but a task to which God calls. To occupy a position at the college means to be placed in a God-ordained office requiring educational service in self-effacing love and obedience to the Lord. When office consciousness is lost, the essential meaning of this work is lost, though the connection to Dordt College may continue to be of personal interest, or prove materially rewarding. Dordt College, therefore, seeks to develop and foster an atmosphere in which the sense of calling and meaningful office consciousness can flourish.

Since the educational mission of Dordt College comprises a diversity of tasks, there is also a diversity of office. Historically, the educational activities of the college involve at least five distinct kinds of office.

Out of the community which accepted the challenge of college-level education, trusted persons were chosen to constitute a board. The board's specific task was to start and to oversee the college. They were and are mandated to provide leadership, especially to guide the religious direction of the college and to ensure its academic excellence.

Competent educators have been engaged to serve Christ in their specific tasks. As educators, these office-bearers have the primary responsibility for the development and transmission of insight. They constitute the faculty, who, through research and teaching, are called to carry out the central educational task of Dordt College.

The students also are called to share in the educational task. As office-bearers they are required to advance the educational enterprise by acquiring, contributing to, and serving as the agents for the transmission of insight from its theoretical beginnings to concrete applications.

The administrators and support staff participate in the educational task of the college as well. They are to construct and maintain the context within which the educational work of the college can grow and thrive.

A distinct office is occupied by the chief executive officer, the president of the college, whose special task is to oversee, guide, and direct the entire academic and administrative life of the institution. The president serves as liaison between board and constituency on the one hand, and faculty, students, administration, and support staff on the other.

²⁰ Romans 12:6–8.

²¹ Psalm 8:6–8; Matthew 25:14, 15.

²² Romans 12:10; 1 Corinthians 12:4, 5.

These tasks compose the one, common educational calling which pervades every segment and activity of Dordt College. Yet, though these tasks are similar in that they all respond to the one, all-encompassing educational calling, each task is unique and functions properly only when the others are duly recognized and allowed free expression. It should be noted, however, that there is not an exclusive identity of office with person, and that a person can occupy more than one office.

To avoid incompetence and to promote responsible use of office, Dordt College aims to provide the kind of educational service which will deepen the insight of its office-bearers. Faculty, administrative, and staff development, therefore, must rank high on the institutional agenda. Board members, too, must continue to grow in insight if they are to function effectively. And students, as a result of their education at Dordt College, may be expected increasingly to exhibit a degree of maturity and wisdom. To ensure that the tasks of the various office-bearers are carried out responsibly and competently, the college community should maintain an effective program of evaluation on all levels.

CHAPTER IV: AUTHORITY

The specific callings, tasks, and offices are associated with specific kinds of authority. Such authority is not to be regarded as supreme. Only God is the Sovereign. All authority among human creatures has been given by God and is therefore always delegated and representative authority.²³

The kinds of authority associated with the various kinds of educational office share with one another the requirement that they be exercised in servanthood.²⁴ Educational authority, therefore, is not to be used in order to dominate or exercise presumed rights. It must be exercised in order to serve, facilitate, and edify. The goal of authority is to permit and to encourage office-bearers to perform their tasks as fully and as effectively as possible in response to the will of the Lord. At the same time, the various kinds of educational authority differ from one another in the extent to which those who exercise such authority are authorized to hold other office-bearers accountable. Some office-bearers are called to oversee the work of other office-bearers; their task, responsibility, and concomitant authority, therefore, are more extensive.

At all levels, authority must go hand in hand with responsibility. Every office-bearer has the responsibility to serve others, and to ensure their freedom to carry out their task and exercise their authority. A spirit of mutual responsibility and accountability to each other before God must exist, if authority is to be exercised in a biblical manner.²⁵

Specifically, the board possesses the authority to make and implement decisions which affect the direction of the entire educational enterprise. Normally the board will entrust the actual day-to-day operation of the college to the other office-bearers. But wherever the board detects a departure from the stated goals of the college, there the board is authorized to act.

The faculty, through its officers, is authorized to exercise authority over the academic and curricular program. As educational office-bearers they must at the time of their appointment give evidence of possessing the requisite competence, insight, and expertise to make and implement curricular, academic, and institutional decisions. Such insight and competence constitute important grounds on which their authority is to rest.

Because they are not the primary initiators of the curricular program, students exercise a more limited, yet meaningful authority. Since by virtue of their task they are directly involved in the actual teaching and learning process, their judgments regarding elements of instruction should be taken seriously. The students must evaluate whether the promise to them by the board, president, and professors is actually being fulfilled. If, through working conscientiously, they find no maturation of personal and communal insight, they are called to express their dissatisfaction, and their voice must be heard. It must be observed, moreover, that the students are significant participants in a major segment of the supporting and facilitation side of Dordt College, namely, student life; in this area, too, their judgments should be given careful consideration by those whose task it is to oversee the work of the entire institution.

²³ Matthew 28:18; Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 3:22.

²⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:5; Philippians 2:3, 4.

²⁵ 1 Peter 4:10, 11.

The authority of the administrators and the support staff is circumscribed by their special task of organizing and facilitating the educational process. Their expertise lies in the administering and carrying out of the academic, financial, operational, and public relations matters.

The office of president of the college is endowed with a broad range of authority. As liaison between board and staff, he speaks to the staff with the specific authority of the board; he speaks to the board with the specific authority of the staff. Moreover, since the president is called to the task of overseeing, guiding, and directing the entire college, it is his responsibility to ensure that the college functions effectively and efficiently. Thus he is authorized to exercise both academic and administrative authority. All office-bearers on the campus, in the performance of their various functions, are accountable to him. The president, in turn, is accountable to the board.

Authority on campus can be exercised effectively and responsibly only if the office-bearers carry out their tasks competently. Board members, as overseers of the college, must exhibit insight and wisdom as they are called to deal with the larger questions of direction. Office bearers endowed with educational authority at the curriculum and academic heart of the college must show themselves competent in their research and teaching. Student authority, as it develops through several years of maturation, is to be closely associated with evaluation of levels of understanding. The administrators and the support staff, too, must be competent to supply an enabling context for the educational process. The president, as leader of the entire institution, must have a special measure of experience and understanding.

The exercise of authority requires structured and open lines of communication. Any person may examine or question procedure, policy decisions, or the college's effectiveness in developing and transmitting serviceable insight. Such questioning should not be regarded as failing to submit to authority or as attacking the legitimacy of authority, but necessary testing of the spirits of the college's activities. Such questioning should, however, be done in a communal spirit of love.

Dordt College recognizes that a distinction must be made between arriving at a decision and implementing a decision. The decision-making process should involve not only the persons who have the authority to implement, but also those who are impacted by the decision. Thus the communal nature of the educational enterprise must constantly come to the fore. Conflicts and disputes are to be resolved not by the force of coercion, but in a spirit of love and mutual trust. Principles guiding the resolution of conflict must be the recognition of proper areas of authority, determined by the specific task of the office-bearers involved, and the willingness to exercise authority in servanthood and stewardship. Thus the exercise of authority may never be designed to advance one's personal viewpoint or advantage, but, rather must always be prompted by the desire to advance, unitedly, the educational purposes of Dordt College.

CHAPTER V: CONTENT

The central educational task of Dordt College is to provide genuinely Christian insight on an advanced level. In our increasingly complex age, such insight is no luxury. To function effectively as a Christian in a technological and secular civilization requires deepening wisdom and understanding. Members of the body of Christ need the ability to distinguish sharply, to think critically, and to judge wisely. In their daily lives they are continually confronted by the difficulties and problems of our age. National and international tensions enter their homes through the media: political and economic problems touch their everyday lives; and the power of technology and mass communications affects them all. In addition, Christians are surrounded by the subtle influences of the secular spirits of our century. Coping with these multi-dimensional problems requires an advanced level of insight. Furthermore, many vocations and occupations have been professionalized to the extent that broad knowledge and a wide range of skills frequently are prerequisites for one's career. Hence, as our civilization advances, more and more insight is needed, not only by leaders, but by all Christians as they seek to do the Lord's bidding in our complex culture.

This situation puts a particularly heavy responsibility on Dordt College and other Christian institutions of higher learning. Such institutions are faced with the need to meet increasingly varied demands. They can no longer be satisfied with the transmission of abstractions. They must provide the kind of insight that enables Christians to carry out their task effectively in a complicated world. Whereas the majority of North American educational institutions transmit little more than the kind of insight that contributes to secularization and

foster individualism, it is the educational task of Dordt College to provide genuinely Christian, that is, truly serviceable insight. Such insight is not designed to enhance the service of one's self, but rather, seeks to equip the Christian community to respond obediently to the central Scriptural command, "Love God above all, and your neighbor as yourself."

Such serviceable insight is, in effect, a contemporary expression of the Scriptural references to wisdom and understanding. The Bible teaches that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, a good understanding have all they that do his commandments."²⁶ Also, "Look carefully, then, how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore don't be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."²⁷ And again: "Who is wise among you? Let him show by his good life his works in meekness of wisdom."²⁸

The Scriptures, then, admonish us to seek wisdom and understanding so that we may be able to discern the will of the Lord and to redeem the times. Dordt College must take this injunction very seriously by seeking to provide and promote such wisdom and understanding. Dordt College must strive to transmit the kind of insight that will enable Christians to discern the will of the Lord for any situation and to develop the capacity to implement it. Serviceable insight, therefore, prepares for kingdom citizenship. And Dordt, as a Christian college, aims to train kingdom citizens aware of the demands of the cultural mandate, equipped to take their place and carry out their tasks within the community of believers, able to discern the spiritual direction of our civilization, and prepared to advance, in loving service, the claims of Christ over all areas of life.

The Christian insight that Dordt College seeks to impart is, therefore, not merely abstract and theoretical. While at its most fundamental level it reflects an understanding of the structure and workings of God's created order, insight includes other dimensions as well, such as the practical ability to carry out one's task in loving obedience and service. Moreover, built into Christian insight is the motivation and desire to function effectively as a kingdom citizen.

It is clear, therefore, that Dordt College is to provide multi-dimensional insight in which theory and practice, though formally distinguishable, are nevertheless closely integrated. The Dordt College graduate must have both a theoretical understanding of a situation and the practical ability and skill to be reformingly busy in response to God's call to service. For that reason, practice or skill is not to be separated from its imbeddedness in the wider structural context to be theoretically understood; nor is the theoretical understanding of God's creation to be divorced from the practical capacity to implement the will of the Lord in everyday situations.

It is evident that in our complex society a growing number of vocations require deepening insight of the kind that Dordt College seeks to provide. One goal of the college is to identify those occupational areas where serviceable insight is increasingly needed. In principle, no legitimate profession, occupation, vocation, or station in life can be precluded from Dordt's educational concern. Wherever insight is required, there Dordt College is called to supply it. The college must therefore continually examine the nature and scope of its offerings and programs. Decisions about programs, however, can no longer be made on the basis of traditional distinctions between professional and nonprofessional vocations. Rather, criteria such as the level of insight required—as well as financial, geographical, and other practical considerations—must play the deciding role. In this way Dordt College, by remaining aware of the demands of the times, can carry out its educational task of providing leadership that is not only uniquely Christian, but also dynamic and relevant.

CHAPTER VI: IMPLEMENTATION

Central to the implementation of the educational task of Dordt College is the curriculum, the basic means for transmitting serviceable insight. The curriculum consists of an organized encyclopedia, that is, a range of fields of investigation. These fields do not constitute a random collection of disciplines and subjects; rather, they reflect a coherent creation order.

²⁶ Psalm 111:10.

²⁷ Ephesians 5:15–17.

²⁸ James 3:13.

Within the encyclopedia those fields that focus on the structure of the created order constitute the backbone of educational activity at Dordt College. Hence there is a strong stress on a core curriculum of various academic disciplines. The created structure is determinative for all of life's functionings. It provides the condition for all creaturely activity. Historical and cultural development, as well as vocational endeavors, take place within and always reflect an ordered creation. The energy question, for example, reflects physical, economic, and other dimensions of reality. To understand this question as a whole requires insight into the nature of the physical and economic aspects. Insight into all kinds of practical situations and problems, therefore, demands concomitant insight into various aspects of God's creation.

At Dordt College the dimensions of reality are examined in order to obtain an understanding of the underlying unity in diversity. Dordt College attempts to convey the perspective of an ordered creation continuously upheld by God's word of power,²⁹ the cosmos in which people are placed and called to carry out their task. Dordt College, therefore, stresses the indispensability of Biblical study and Christian philosophy to our understanding of the character and coherence of the created order.

Insight into the structure of the creation is to be integrally linked to an investigation of man's response to God's call to service. In their building of civilizations, God's image bearers have been guided by a variety of spirits. Dordt College, therefore, requires the student to engage in a broad study of history and of contemporary problems. The investigation of historical developments is designed to enable the student to recognize the various deformations effected by secular and humanistic spirits, as well as the wholesome result of God-obedient activity. Such an investigation equips students to discover and evaluate the character of their own civilization. In addition, Dordt College seeks to provide insight into a number of the most crucial problems of our age. As the world seems to be shrinking, more and more of the great questions of our time impinge on our lives and require our judgment. Contemporary examples of such problems are the energy question, the role of the media, and the impact of technology. Dordt College aims to implement a curriculum sufficiently flexible to address the problems as they arise. By requiring the study of history and contemporary problems, Dordt College, as a Calvinistic institution in the tradition of the Reformation, seeks to instill the ability to discern the spirits and to engage in genuinely reforming cultural activity.

Lastly, Dordt College seeks to provide insight into the nature and demands of the various vocational and professional tasks. Graduates of Dordt College must be equipped to carry out their tasks as kingdom citizens in the professions, careers, and occupations to which they have been called. As a result, majors and preprofessional programs form another essential component of the curriculum.

While the various disciplines and programs, together with historical and contemporary studies, constitute the core of the curriculum, Dordt College by no means neglects the various skills required by graduates as they continue in their calling. Emphasis is placed on analytic, communicative, artistic, and physical skills, as these are essential for effective Christian service. Other skills, too, as demanded by the nature of vocational tasks, are included in the curricular offerings. The teaching of such special skills forms an integral part of majors and preprofessional programs, and thus of the entire curriculum.

The components of the curriculum—namely, courses in academic disciplines, studies of history and contemporary problems, major and preprofessional programs, and skill courses—together constitute the basic ingredients required by the student to attain genuine Christian insight and wisdom. None of these facets may be isolated from any of the others. For this reason, Dordt College seeks to offer an integrated curriculum conducive to contextual learning.

Since, as stated in the preceding chapter, truly serviceable insight involves theoretical comprehension, practical ability, and proper motivation, the curriculum of Dordt College aims at coherence and interrelatedness. Education at Dordt College is not a concatenation of unrelated facts or isolated bits of information; nor does the curriculum consist of dissociated academic subjects and unconnected skill courses. Rather, the various areas of the curriculum, whether they involve academic disciplines, creative activity, or skills, are to be interrelated within the unifying framework of a Biblical perspective.

In order to implement such an integrated curriculum more effectively, Dordt College strongly encourages and promotes communal scholarship. Faculty members responsible for the various components of the

²⁹ Hebrews 1:3; 2 Peter 3:5.

curriculum are to become increasingly aware of each other's work. Dordt's faculty ought to develop into a team of teachers and scholars, competent professionals who are vitally concerned about their teaching effectiveness, their area of academic specialization, and their responsibility to contribute to the overall development of integrated serviceable insight.

While the curriculum, organized as an encyclopedia of fields of investigation, constitutes the central part of the educational task of Dordt College, the non-curricular aspects of the college also play an essential role in the implementation of that task. Both curricular and extracurricular activities have the same goal: the development and transmission of insight. It is clear that much extracurricular activity on campus relates to one or more of the fields of investigation formally treated in the curriculum. Conferences, clubs, special events, and guest lecturers, for example, normally deal with specific topics already considered in the disciplines. Dordt College, therefore, seeks to provide a wide range of extracurricular opportunities to develop and enhance serviceable insights.

Finally, inherent in all of Dordt's educational activity, whether curricular or extracurricular, is the goal of developing a desire to serviceable insight. To a large extent Dordt College will have failed if it graduated knowledgeable and skillful students who lack the desire to carry out their tasks in service and loving obedience. The college must therefore, cooperate closely with church and home to develop and foster genuine Christian attitudes by promoting Scripturally-oriented devotional and social activities. Such activities ought not to be considered mere additions to the academic task; rather, they should be integrated into the total pattern of curricular and extracurricular activity, all of which is designed to provide the student with serviceable insight, i.e., wisdom according to the mind of Christ.³⁰

CHAPTER VII: ACADEMIC FREEDOM

The implementation of the educational task described in the preceding chapters includes an institutional commitment to the principle of academic freedom. A Reformed view of academic freedom rests in part on the biblical concept of sphere sovereignty.

Dordt College occupies a distinct societal sphere with its own God-given authority and responsibility.

The college desires to cooperate with other nonacademic institutions such as businesses, churches, or governments; but these institutions must not infringe on the academic integrity of the college.

Academic freedom must also be acknowledged and promoted within the institution. The college must stimulate, not inhibit, genuine Christian scholarship and teaching. The faculty must be free to explore and investigate.

Such freedom, however, is not to be equated with enlightenment philosophy. Individual autonomy, the traditional idea of academic freedom, suggests that freedom knows no bounds. This view is not acceptable because all perceptions of academic freedom are, in fact, based on worldviews that set parameters for the academic enterprise. All scholarship and teaching is governed by an allegiance to prior commitments. The enlightenment view of academic freedom is grounded in assumptions about individual autonomy that exclude institutional and communal claims.

Unlike secular-religious views of academic freedom that do not acknowledge limitations and restrictions established by unexpressed assumptions, Dordt College boldly maintains that the academic freedom on its campus is restricted and bounded by the Word of God and a Reformed view of academic life as set forth in *The Educational Task of Dordt College*.

When appointments are made, all parties must clearly understand the nature and parameters of the statement of purpose, *The Educational Task of Dordt College*, and agree to carry out their academic responsibilities within the framework articulated therein. At the same time they must agree that if, in the performance of their academic task, they find themselves departing from the stated goals and purposes of the college, they should be prepared for the reevaluation and possible termination of their appointment by the board of trustees.³¹

Explicit affirmation of *The Educational Task of Dordt College* and contractual obligations establishes a framework from which faculty are encouraged to engage in creative and innovative Christian scholarship. Faculty are free to explore and investigate—to “think new thoughts.” Dordt College faculty are busy explor-

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:15–16.

³¹ See Chapter IV.

ing and developing our world by asking probing questions, ideas, and freely dialoguing with differing perspectives.

Encouraging such scholarship motivates Dordt College both to actively promote an environment of trust and mutual responsibility and to discourage a climate of suspicion and judgmentalism. Academic freedom implies, therefore, a cooperation with one another and a growing understanding that disagreement does not necessarily imply error and need not lead to confrontation and division.

Dordt College confesses that the source of true freedom is Jesus Christ. Christ empowers us by His Spirit and directs us by His Word. He frees us to perform our academic task in a liberating way that enables us to respond obediently to His call.