



The Educational Framework of Dordt University

Preface

The Educational Task of Dordt University, formulated and adopted between 1979 and 1996, sets forth the basic overarching principles that direct Dordt University in fulfilling its educational purpose.

The Educational Task of Dordt University makes clear that the academic program, which is central to the mission of the university, must present a coherent view of the created world—not a random collection of disciplines and subjects.

In 1993 the faculty deepened this understanding by adopting a framework for the overall academic program. *The Educational Framework of Dordt University* elaborates on Chapter VI: “Implementation” of *The Educational Task of Dordt University*. It clarifies what the academic program should look like and how it should be structured to fulfill the mission of the university.

The goal for every academic department of the university, whether curricular or cocurricular, is to develop the four coordinates (Religious Orientation, Creational Structure, Creational Development, and Contemporary Response within the respective area of learning). This is an on-going effort of continuous improvement and renewal to be more biblically obedient, contextually relevant, and culturally active as an academic community. We do this to develop and transmit serviceable insight to learners engaged as God’s kingdom builders.

The Educational Framework of Dordt University is not the final word on academic matters at the university. Indeed, the reformational directive to be always reforming will lead future Dordt faculty members to articulate an even more biblically sensitive view of curricular content and design. The faculty welcomes readers’ response to and evaluation of the *Educational Framework*.

Introduction

The Educational Framework of Dordt University sets forth a structure for the overall educational program at Dordt University. We begin with a section on the underlying educational principles of the university. This part contains a number of statements that spell out our confessional basis and religious affiliation and that delineate the main features of our educational task.

What we say on these topics is not new; it summarizes what has been said elsewhere: in *Scripturally Oriented Higher Education*, *The Educational Task of Dordt University*, and *Renewing Our Vision*. We include these statements here to give an explicit context for the remainder of the document.

The second section contains some parameters for organizing the curriculum, both with respect to curricular content and curricular design. It describes in general terms what the curriculum should be and how it should be structured in order to fulfill the mission of the university.

Our treatment of the content of the curriculum, as well as of the curricular goals in the following section, is organized under four broad headings: *religious orientation*, *creational structure*, *creational*

development, and *contemporary response*. These categories are meant to be comprehensive and inclusive, not the exclusive domain of particular disciplines. They sum up our curricular responsibilities before God, regardless of specialty. Each part of the curriculum should be infused with Christian perspective, should reveal how God has structured that field of investigation for the benefit of his creatures, should show how that area of creation has unfolded over time and how human beings have responded to God's law there, and should prepare students to fulfill their contemporary responsibilities relative to the insights it provides. Different courses may weigh these things differently, but all four sides should be present in a balanced way in every student's program.

This fourfold classification provides a coherent curricular framework that is consistent with a reformational Christian perspective. None of these dimensions can be considered in isolation from the rest, but each highlights an important feature of the curriculum and of life itself. In a sense, the first three may be viewed as culminating in the last: we respond in contemporary situations according to our religious orientation, the structure of the situation, and the possibilities for action that are available to us at the time. The conceptual schema we have adopted directs our attention to each of these points in turn, as well as on the need to respond.

In the last section we focus on curricular goals and student outcomes. These are the general abilities and characteristics we would like to see developed by the curriculum in all those who graduate from Dordt University. We have not tried to separate student outcomes from curricular input, since we see these as two sides of the same coin. Nevertheless, more specific curricular objectives for accomplishing the overall goals will need to be fleshed out for each program.

In formulating student outcomes we have consciously incorporated what are usually called “skills” into the section dealing with creational structure. This was done for two reasons. First, we did not want to artificially separate skills from knowledge and commitment: all three are and should be woven together to provide students with the abilities and resources needed to engage our world Christianly. Each area of study must help students acquire and develop theoretical and intuitive insights (knowledge or understanding), cultivate those abilities necessary for appropriating and applying them (skills), and build personal responsibility and initiative (commitment). Secondly, these

competencies are essential to the nature of learning. They are practiced abilities students should possess in order to be effectively engaged in the educational process and be prepared for the challenge of Christian discipleship in today’s society.

The principles, parameters, and goals comprise the framework for the total curriculum and a context in which each individual program can take shape. The core program, professional and preprofessional programs, majors, and minors should each articulate its own framework and relate it to that of the total curriculum. Once this is done, programs can be evaluated and redesigned, if necessary, to make them more productive participants in fulfilling the mission of the university.

Underlying Principles for Christian University Education

A. Confessional Basis and Tenets

1. Scriptural Direction and Reformed Tradition

The Bible is God's written Word. It reveals his will for creation and provides guidance for our lives. Our understanding of the implications of Scripture for the scope and meaning of our task as a Christian community stands within the Reformed tradition of John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, and their followers.

2. Creation

Our entire world, in all its parts, aspects, and relations, is the revelatory creation of the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God orders and preserves the cosmos by his Word as an expression of covenantal love. All things are unified under God's rule and exist to give him glory.

3. Humanity

Human beings were created to bear God's image. As such, they were given a mandate to cultivate creation, to develop its potential and take good care of it.

4. Fall Into Sin

Through humanity's willful disobedience to God, sin entered the world. Sin disrupted communication between God and humankind, spawned disharmony between people, set men and women in harmful opposition to the rest of creation, and brought a curse on creation that resulted in hardship and death.

5. Redemption and Restoration

God sent his only son, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, to save us from sin and restore all things to himself. Jesus's death and resurrection broke the domination of the evil one and inaugurated the renewal of creation. The divine campaign to regain full control over the world will be completed when the Lord returns to make everything right.

6. The Kingdom of God and the Task of the Church

As God's people, the church, we are called to be agents of reconciliation. Under the leading of the Holy Spirit and in communion with God and one another, we are to summon sinners to repentance and strive to advance God's rule in all areas of life. We seek to transform culture and bring shalom to a broken world.

7. Christian Education

Christian education is an integral part of the Christian community's contemporary responsibility before God. It assists each new generation of God's people to discern his will for their time and place. It prepares them to care for and unfold all of creation in praise to him and it helps them to fight against the works of the devil.

8. Christian University Education

Christian university education develops insight, capabilities, and Christian perspective across a broad spectrum of areas and at an advanced level of theoretical reflection and practical competence so that God's people can become better equipped to serve him as mature adults in all areas of life.

B. Educational Task of Dordt University

1. Educational Mission of Dordt University

Dordt University strives to develop and share serviceable insight into the meaning, structure, and development of the world God has created and graciously maintains.

2. Serviceable Insight

Education at Dordt University is not pursued for its own sake nor for its civilizing qualities nor for the strictly pragmatic purposes of vocational instruction, but to provide insight and develop talents that will sustain lifelong responsible service in God's kingdom. The knowledge, competencies, and commitments gained through the educational process aim to prepare students to live thankful lives before the Lord; to serve others with integrity, in common everyday activities as well as in specific vocations; and to unfold and care for creation.

3. University Community

Within the context of Dordt's administrative support staff and its constituency among God's people, the faculty and students of Dordt University form a community of scholars responsible for developing and sharing serviceable insight on all aspects of creation.

4. Curriculum

Dordt University accomplishes its educational task primarily via the curriculum, which is the formally structured set of interconnected learning activities and experiences designed to realize the mission and goals of the university. The curriculum thus constitutes the central focus of the university's organization and activities.

5. Living Environment and Cocurricular Activities

While remaining focused on its educational task, the university must treat its members as whole people. It should therefore maintain an environment that promotes responsible Christian living and supports scholarly investigation and practice. Cocurricular activities and organization of university life in general should facilitate and complement study of the curriculum, so that the university can better realize its mission.

Parameters of Curricular Organization

A. Curricular Content

1. Religious Orientation

The curriculum should be rooted in the Word of God and infused with a reformational worldview to reflect the fact that all of creation is related to God as its Creator, Redeemer, and Lord.

2. Creational Structure

The curriculum should be organized into a balanced cohesive whole of complementary academic programs to faithfully reflect the diversity and coherence of reality. The curriculum should include the study of general areas of common concern to all people, and it should contain in-depth study of selected fields of specialization.

3. Creational Development

The curriculum should reflect and promote knowledge of the dynamic unfolding of creation, and it should highlight the various aspects of human responsibility and involvement in this process.

4. Contemporary Response

The curriculum should help students convert their insights and competencies into committed action. It should enable them to translate the results of theoretical investigation into faithful response to God and practical Christian service to their neighbor. Insofar as resources permit, the curriculum should contain a focused range of programs that explore the main areas of contemporary life, giving opportunities for study in those academic fields where genuine biblical insight has been developed and the Christian community's need and significant student interest have been demonstrated. The curriculum should be broad enough to address the pressing concerns of today's world, but narrow enough to be able to treat these issues with the sustained thoroughness required to develop genuinely serviceable insight on them from a Christian perspective.

B. Curricular Design

1. Sequencing of Learning

The curriculum should be organized vertically into a sequence of courses and learning activities that build upon previous learning experiences and that demonstrate sensitivity to and understanding of the various types and stages of maturation that normally take place during typical university-age years.

2. Coordination of Learning

Curricular programs should be organized horizontally to complement and interconnect with one another and to provide a well-rounded understanding of creation. The curriculum should arrange ways in which insights from different fields of investigation can be integrated to provide comprehensive understanding of issues.

3. Pedagogy for Effective Learning

The curriculum should be organized to employ instructional styles and strategies that suit the subject matter being studied, that recognize different stages of late adolescent development and help students progress in their learning, that employ learning experiences to match the various ways students learn, that foster communal scholarship, that capitalize upon and broaden faculty members' strengths, that encourage student reflection and response, and that connect learning with real-life situations.

4. Assessment of Learning

Students' progress should be regularly assessed as part of the educational process in order to monitor their success and that of the various programs in meeting the goals of the university.

5. Extension of Learning

The curriculum should be organized to facilitate interaction with Dordt's constituency, other Christian organizations, and the surrounding community. The curriculum should reach out through appropriate study centers, workshops, practicums, internships, and other channels to develop and extend serviceable insight into the life of contemporary society.

Curricular Goals

Student Outcomes

A. Religious Orientation

1. Biblical Basis

Students should recognize the guiding role of the Bible in a life of Christian discipleship. They should be familiar with the main themes and teachings of the Bible, and they should be able to develop scripturally-based perspectives and strategies on contemporary issues.

2. Reformed Faith and Worldview

Students should have a good working understanding and appreciation of the Reformed Christian faith, both with regard to its roots in God's revelation and its elaboration in a distinctly Christian worldview. They should be able to discern, evaluate, and challenge the prevailing spirits and worldviews of our age in the light of God's Word and our reformational perspective.

3. Christian Lifestyle

Students should know the nature and implications of living a life of Christian discipleship in today's world, and they should be committed to developing such a lifestyle and to transforming those features of our culture that oppose it.

B. Creational Structure

1. Lawful Regularity of Creation

Students should understand that all of creation has been structured in an orderly way by God and that he faithfully preserves it through his laws, thus making possible the systematic organization experienced in each field of investigation.

2. Coherence of Creation

Students should understand that all of creation is unified in Christ Jesus as its sovereign head and that nothing exists apart from him or has a right to our ultimate allegiance. They should also learn to appreciate and properly distinguish the rich diversity within the creation. They should recognize the interdependence of the various parts and aspects of creation, and they should be able to connect what they learn to their everyday experience and their future vocations.

3. Place of Human Beings in Creation

Students should recognize the central position human beings hold in creation as image bearers of God. They should learn to exhibit proper care and respect for everything God has created, acknowledging their responsibility to treat all creatures justly and with compassion; and they should know how to maintain a balanced, wholesome lifestyle.

4. Disciplined Focus of Learning

Students should be able to use the ideas, theories, and procedures from a variety of disciplines in order to conceptualize issues, solve problems, and provide service to others in daily life. They should be competent in one or more specialized fields of inquiry, and they should be acquainted with the main contours of other fields of study.

5. Structural Conditions of Learning

Students should develop the various abilities and understandings necessary for engaging in university-level learning and for continuing to develop, share, and apply serviceable insights after graduation. They should be able to work professionally and cooperatively with others,

taking responsibility for their work and striving to build community among people with diverse backgrounds, interests, and capabilities.

C. Creational Development

1. Dynamic Character of Created Reality

Students should appreciate the developmental nature of reality. They should understand in broad terms how our world has developed, and they should be equipped to cope with a rapidly changing world.

2. The Cultural Mandate and Stewardship

Students should recognize their calling to give form to culture as creative historical agents acting in obedience to God. They should comprehend and appreciate their God-given responsibility to unfold the potential of creation in stewardly ways, exhibiting care for and proper use of the things they employ, and showing concern for those creatures that suffer from the misery caused by human sin and error.

3. Development of Culture and Civilization

Students should understand and critically evaluate the formative processes and religious spirits by which our civilization and others have been shaped. They should understand how creation has developed historically and human civilizations have helped to form today's world. Students should be familiar with the different ways in which major world cultures and civilizations have responded to the cultural mandate, and they should be aware of the interconnected global nature of contemporary life.

4. Historical Development of Fields of Study

Students should be able to identify and evaluate influential formative traditions operating

in their particular disciplines and vocations and in common areas of life. They should be familiar with the resources available to them for developing new perspectives or plans of action consistent with a Christian worldview.

D. Contemporary Response

1. Learning for Service

Students should develop the insights, skills, and strategies needed to contribute entry-level expertise and work in their special vocations and the common tasks of adult life. They should realize that they are called to vocations and communal responsibilities by God himself, and they should seek those areas of service that further his kingdom.

2. Gaining in Wisdom

Students should exhibit increasing wisdom, rooted in a mature fear of the Lord, in their understanding of his world and their service to his kingdom. They should be equipped for, and committed to, lifelong learning so that they can continue to develop and apply insight in faithful response to God.

3. Commitment to Transforming Culture

Students should be sensitive to the impact of sin and idolatry in their own lives, in human society, and in the world around them. They should show a desire to transform the world for the service of God's kingdom and the good of all his creatures. They should seek Christian responses to the world's contemporary needs, and they should actively participate in their various communities, supporting with their time, money, and prayers those institutions and ventures that serve God's kingdom and promote a Christian vision of life.



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