Not Just for Traditional, Four-Year Students

Sarah Vander Plaats
*Dordt College, sarah.vanderplaats@dordt.edu*

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NOT JUST FOR TRADITIONAL, FOUR-YEAR STUDENTS

President Erik Hoekstra recounts the conversation he had with a mother of a Dordt student who planted the idea of Christian higher education for students interested in more hands-on, career-focused pathways.

Her daughter had gone to Dordt College and majored in social work. Her daughter’s experience, coupled with a desire for a Christian education, was a factor in her son’s decision to come to Dordt a few years later. But ultimately, he couldn’t find a place for himself.

“Their son struggled at Dordt—he found no major that was a right fit for him and his unique skills and talents,” says Hoekstra. “In that conversation I asked his mom what she thought about Dordt designing programs where there could be more hands-on learning, maybe in a two-year environment. The idea brought tears to her eyes because she knew what a great blessing it would be to her family and to other families.”

The simple idea took root, and Dordt College expects to enroll its first crop of students into the new Pro-Tech (professional-technical) program in the fall of 2017, pending accreditation. This innovative program is an offering that few, if any, Christian colleges are attempting. Students enrolling in the two-year vocational fields of study will still enjoy a full Dordt College experience, living on campus, worshipping in chapel, and participating in co-curricular activities.

Initial programs of study will be in farm operations and manufacturing. As the program expands, so will the program offerings.

Dr. Joel Sikkema, Pro-Tech director, says, “A significant portion of the students’ experience will be in internships with local businesses. In the middle of their first semester, students will already begin working two full days each week at an internship.” These internships continue throughout the program, including a full-time summer internship in Northwest Iowa or at a partnering business in the United States or Canada.

At the heart of Pro-Tech is Dordt’s mission of equipping students to work effectively toward Christ-centered renewal in all areas of life.

“A Christian education shouldn’t be confined to only those students seeking a four-year education,” says Hoekstra. “All students deserve to be equipped to be kingdom citizens who glorify God in industry and all aspects of life.”

To date, more than 65 inquiries have been received from as far away as California, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Dordt hopes to enroll 40 students in the inaugural class.

FILLING A VOID

In September, Dordt held its first Pro-Tech Campus Visit Day, hosting 17 students and their families. Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey joined the visitors and spoke about the current situation facing ag and manufacturing businesses.

“Businesses will tell you that one of the greatest challenges is staffing their facilities with people who can run sophisticated equipment,” says Northey. “I know of a plant in Northwest Iowa that cannot expand as they cannot find enough good people to expand operations or replace retirees.”

Northey explained that employers need people who not only know the technologies of today, but are change-ready and able to adapt to new technologies available in the future.

“Learning and gaining those skills is a natural part of the Pro-Tech program,” he says.