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Testimony: Being a Minority at Dordt

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Testimony: Being a Minority at Dordt

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Harry Lee

Thanksgiving turkeys, Super Bowl, Pop Tarts, a garbage disposal unit (a.k.a. sink shredders), and even donut runs; these are some of the things I never knew existed before coming to the United States for college.

Approximately 2 years ago, I set foot on this unexperienced continent. The only American culture I knew was through the lens of Hollywood movies, advertisements, and Facebook. I knew English, but not very effortlessly. You might think I sound pretty okay. You'll soon discover that reading off a script is not an identical experience with unrehearsed personal communication.

Like many of the students here, I left the nest of my family for college. Dordt College and the community of Sioux Center was quite the warm welcome for me. Out of my worries, the people were extra-friendly—a lot more than I expected. No angry car drivers; no late-night dangers or threats; no other significant discriminations to speak of in detail.

I mean, you say “Hi” to almost every stranger you pass by; vivid smiles are a common display on people’s faces—that is, excluding those nastiest winter blowing days and crop-fertilizing days. Throughout my two years of my stay, I’ve travelled to the bigger cities in the States. They were a complete change of mood and atmosphere. I don’t know about anything else, but I missed the *people* of Sioux Center. Your smiles and open hearts assisted me to fit-in not only as a student and friend, but also as a respected body. In my freshman year, my advisor, orientation staff, and resident assistant’s, international staff, personal mentors, and rest of the faculty always bombarded me with questions concerning my well-being. I didn’t run out of people to ask for help; I ran out of struggles to share. “What a college” I thought to myself. That is one part I want to express—my appreciation and gratitude to Dordt College and broadly, the community of Sioux Center.

Personally, being a Korean here is not easy. Simply because of the fact that English is my second language, I had trouble getting involved as I have imagined it to be. I am different in a lot of ways and people know that. Every freshman tends to be scared to the new atmosphere of college, but for a minority from half-way around the world, that is even more difficult. The diversity of international students here is only a handful—it’s not like we have an innumerable diversity. I apologize for maybe overgeneralizing, but Dordt College appears to be somewhat mono-ethnic and mono-cultural. I see a *lot* of Dutch people around here. I love Dutch people.

Being a minority is rough. No matter how interactive my personality may be, I cannot fully express myself—I cannot connect as much as I think. This sometimes lets on to self-rebuke and low self-esteem. Believe me, I’m not the worst of the Koreans; most feel even worse. Many of the international students I know have to spend at least twice of the effort and time to stay on track academically. One thing I hope the people here would try and understand more is that we are *trying* our best. Without my dictionary on my phone and my laptop, half of the lectures don’t even make sense. Slangs and idioms don’t even pop up.

If there is one thing that I would like to ask the campus of Dordt College it would be: with due respect, it’s not about changing your choice of vocabularies, nor bringing more of our (the international student minority) culture to Sioux Center. Simply, please don’t be afraid to approach us. We are here to learn, experience, and engage; but approach needs to be both ways. I’ve heard of some stories of people who

fear to approach the international students for the fear of becoming a minority among us. We desire to be active participants in the school. We should try harder. But this preconception seems to get excessive at times—ending up as an one-sided approach. It's a simple favor, to have a little bit more patience with us. Approach us; build more personal communications. Go a little bit further than an average "how are you doing?" Some of us crave to talk and share; we want to hear more of your stories. But, sometimes, I feel suppressed when the approach ends up one-way. Even people from the *same culture* build misunderstandings without efficient communication. Instead of leaving it up to our presumptions and judgments, let's talk. When we stop talking, it's not likely that we feel awkward; simply, we don't know what to say. Sounds similar, but completely different intentions. We may sound different and funny. But when you get to know us deeper in a personal level, you will find out that there are more amusing contributions we share further than our accents.

About this post

This article was originally shared with Dordt College on Wednesday, April 1 during the campus' weekly chapel time. Come back to iAt on Friday to listen to the chapel's podcast as other students share their experiences of diversity in college.