Dordt's First Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence

Shelbi Gesch

Dordt College

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A large map posted outside Dordt’s Education Department is dotted with red push pins that show where Dordt graduates are currently teaching. Though the United States is covered by the thickest distribution of pins, there is a significant scattering of pins throughout the world. Wherever Dordt students end up teaching, they are served by the global perspective they cultivated in their courses.

Dordt’s first Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence, Education Professor Joyce West, is encouraging Dordt education students during her semester-long visit this fall to think broadly and globally about education. The Fulbright Program, a function of the United States Department of State, provides funding for American colleges and universities to bring scholars from other countries to their campus as instructors and students.

Joyce West

West comes to Dordt from the Akademie Reformatorise Opleiding en Studies (AROS), a Reformed, Christian institution for higher education in Pretoria, South Africa.

Dordt has developed a partnership with AROS over the past several years. West’s semester here comes after Dordt Education Professor Tim Van Soelen was invited to Pretoria to visit AROS and work with students and professors there in 2015.

West’s field of research is in linguistics, specifically the teaching of English as a second “or third or fourth language.” She specializes in trans-languaging, which describes how multilingual people deploy complex linguistic resources in their social and political contexts.

“In most of South Africa,” West explains, “you will have about five different native languages in a classroom, so how do you accommodate that? And if you can’t speak any of those languages, how do you deal with that?” Trans-languaging provides tools to deal with these dilemmas.

West is passionate about teaching literacy and language in a multilingual classroom in a way that respects the native language of each student. “You need to protect your native language because with culture and with language comes identity,” says West. “Also, science has shown us that a second language needs to develop from the native language.”

She says language learning works best in the classroom when native languages are understood as a resource, not an obstacle to be overcome. “The best way to frame it,” she says, “is to ask: ‘How can I use native languages? How can I collaborate these two and find a way forward?’”

Yet, she also believes in the importance of teaching English. “English serves an important purpose across the globe—it’s a useful lingua franca, providing a way to communicate and find a place of common ground among the many differences.”

This semester, West is teaching the Foundations of Literacy course alongside Dordt Education Professor Gwen Marra. She’s also teaching courses in Reading Methods, Assessment, and English as a Second Language.

Dordt College associate provost Dr. Leah Zuidema says West’s semester-long visit has provided opportunities for intercultural exchange.

“These kinds of exchanges provide both windows and mirrors,” Zuidema says. “Professor West has a one-semester window into the life of a Dordt College professor, and she also gives students, faculty, and staff at Dordt College a window into South African culture and education by sharing from her experiences.

“Intercultural exchange also provides a virtual mirror—a chance to see more clearly who we are, what makes us unique, and what we share in common. What a beautiful way to celebrate both our unity in Christ and the diversity of his world!”

SHELBI GESCH (’17)