Wall Street Journal Ranks Dordt Number One in Student Engagement Nationwide

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When senior biology major Caeden Tinklenberg first heard that the Wall Street Journal's 2017 College Rankings had listed Dordt as number one in student engagement, he wasn't surprised.

“Since I arrived here in 2013, it was immediately made clear to me by my professors that they were not going to let me go through my four years here as a passive student,” Tinklenberg says.

Dordt was ranked first out of 1,111 colleges and universities, including Swarthmore College, Michigan State University, and Baylor University. Student engagement, according to the Wall Street Journal, is the best way to understand the quality of teaching at a college or university—“how well it manages to inform, inspire, and challenge its students.”

To measure engagement, the Wall Street Journal examined four key questions:

• To what extent does the college support critical thinking?

• To what extent does the teaching support students in applying their learning to the real world?

• To what extent did the classes taken in college challenge the student?

Tinklenberg says some of the most engaging and challenging courses he’s taken at Dordt are those in the Kuyper Scholars Program (KSP). Dr. Mary Dengler, director of the program and a Dordt English professor, challenges KSP students to write papers, lead discussions, reflect upon each other’s arguments—essentially, to engage themselves completely in the learning process.

“They study hard, worship hard, play hard—they do everything hard,” said Dengler. “I’m finding that’s pretty typical for students at Dordt. I’m seeing more students who are going after learning, and I love to see that. Engaged? Yes, many students are putting themselves forward to get answers and take control of their education.”

Along with the four key questions, the Wall Street Journal considered how likely students are to recommend their college to friends or family as well as how often students have the opportunity to interact with faculty and other students.

Dordt alumnus Josh Bowar ('05), head of school at Sioux Center Christian School and Dordt Alumni Council member, said that the most engaging aspect of his education was the time he spent interacting with his professors.

“I am still being mentored by the professors I had,” Bowar says. “When you’re a student at Dordt, you know your professors care deeply about you. It’s not just a question of whether you’re understanding the material in the syllabus. Their deep hope is that you will be an effective kingdom citizen, always seeking to apply and live out a reformational worldview wherever you are.”

The rankings were determined based on the Times Higher Education U.S. Student Survey, the Academic Reputation Survey, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data, and the College Scorecard.

Bowar sees student engagement as one way to frame Dordt’s commitment to its educational mission.

“Dordt connects faith, learning, and God’s story—and emphasizes living that out today, right where you are, with the opportunities he has given you,” he says.

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