New Research Institute Brings New Funding

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NEW RESEARCH INSTITUTE BRINGS NEW FUNDING

“This is not a fundamental change, but a way to do even more,” Tintle says.

When he became director for research and scholarship in 2014, Tintle sat down with every faculty member and asked what kind of scholarly work they would like to do if given the opportunity.

“They all had ideas,” he says. But two obstacles surfaced: time and money—which often end up being the same issue. At tuition-based teaching institutions like Dordt College, heavier faculty teaching loads make finding time for rigorous scholarship more difficult. Salaries, facilities, and student aid dominate budgets that are based on a set faculty-to-student ratio.

At least two things contributed to the move toward a Research Institute. A $4 million grant from the estate of Lowell Andreas several years ago allowed Dordt to support some faculty and student research projects. In addition, Dordt faculty members have been increasingly successful in obtaining outside funding for their scholarly work. In the past five years, Dordt College has been the top recipient of external grants to fund research among private colleges in Iowa, and as Tintle notes, funding momentum often leads to new sources of revenue.

So, the time seemed right to try a new model that could increase funding resources for research, especially for releasing faculty from the 24-credit annual teaching loads required to keep tuition costs manageable. The Research Institute will buy part of a faculty member’s contract, allowing the college to hire someone else to teach that course or courses for the duration of the project.

“The Research Institute is one way we hope to encourage a broad range of scholarly work and ensure that more resources are available to support it,” says Provost Eric Forseth.

Why is this so important? Being engaged in their fields and that of their colleagues encourages the growth of excellent and energetic faculty and has an impact on student learning and engagement, Forseth says.

“Involvement in scholarly work directly contributes to faculty’s ability to provide a contemporary Christian response to the direction of society and the world,” says Tintle. Dordt’s annual “Faculty Scholarship, Achievements, and Service Report” lists 89 percent of the faculty at least once in its pages. (Most of the publications produced are archived in

SCHOLARLY WORK

Some examples of recent faculty scholarly work include for following:

- Dr. Channon Visscher was a visiting scientist last summer at Southwest Research Institute (SwRI) in Boulder, Colorado, and co-author of an article published in the prestigious scientific journal Nature Geoscience, which presented research done at SwRI about how the Moon became the Moon.

- Dr. Kathleen VanTol has been working with Ministry of Education officials in Nicaragua on special education programs that are bringing students who had previously been unable to attend school into classrooms.

- Drs. Justin Vander Werff and Joel Sikkema gave presentations at the Christian Engineering Conference on “Distinctively Christian Engineering: Implementing Guiding Principles in our Civil Curriculum.”

- Dr. Walker Cosgrove was recently accepted to a competitive workshop accepting a very limited number of participants on the “Verbal Art of Plato,” sponsored by the Council of Independent Colleges.

Education Professor Dr. Kathleen VanTol doesn’t make simple distinctions between her roles as teacher and researcher. She invites her students to participate in her scholarly work as a learning opportunity.
Dordt's digital collection, which can be accessed through the Dordt website.

"Many think of research as discovery, but it can be much broader," says Tintle. Dordt's program will follow what is known as Boyer's model of scholarship, which includes discovery of new ideas and results, application of discovery-based knowledge, integration between disciplines (including understanding the role of faith in learning), and teaching and learning scholarship.

"I think the Research Institute will help us become a bit more formal about our faculty development program and processes," says Tintle, who will play a key role in the process and has a wealth of experience in applying for grants to fund research. He has received more than $4.5 million in funding in the past five years and recently published a textbook that takes a new approach to teaching statistics. As director for research and scholarship, he and a team of faculty members help others through the application process, drawing on their own experience to determine the most helpful ways to proceed and most helpful avenues to pursue.

Tintle's history of grant funding may also help open the door to further institutional funding for projects proposed by his colleagues. Agencies are frequently predisposed to awarding money to people and institutions that have a proven track record. And donors get excited about contributing when they see increasing levels of activity and new outside funding.

But the Research Institute will do much more than help find outside funding.

“There are many projects our faculty want to work on and that we want them to work on that may not be good candidates for outside funding,” says Tintle. By getting more projects funded externally, more internal money can be freed up for projects deemed important at Dordt but that may not fit the interests of a funding agency. It will also be a place Dordt’s donors can demonstrate their support for original scholarly work.

While the primary reason for the Institute is to expand funding opportunities, Tintle sees other reasons for the new body, too. In an increasingly litigious society, having a separate institute puts up some legal barriers between the college and research conducted by professors and students.

“The world is changing and increasing numbers of rules and regulations come into play in the awarding of grants,” says Tintle. Setting up the Research Institute as a separate entity allows the institute to somewhat separate its legal status from that of Dordt College and its assets. Meanwhile, Dordt maintains oversight of the kind of work that is funded by administering a detailed faculty evaluation and approval process for projects.

Over the next five years, college donors have committed $750,000 to use as seed money to get the Research Institute started. Tintle’s office plans to develop a database that will help them match faculty research ideas to funding sources. He believes these efforts will spawn a range of new scholarly work.

“I’m very optimistic about the possibilities this presents,” says Tintle.

SALLY JONGSMA

**RECENT AWARDS**

In the past couple of years, Dordt faculty from a variety of disciplines have received awards that recognized their work or enabled them to take on interesting projects:

- Engineering Professor Dr. Kayt Frisch received a Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust Grant to set up a new biomechanics lab.
- Dr. John Visser received the Chewning award for Christ-likeness in scholarship and commitment to the integration of Christian faith and learning.
- Dr. Robert De Haan received a $20,000 grant from the Iowa DNR to write about his water quality research.
- Drs. Tim Van Soelen and Mark McCarthy received funding from the Fulbright program to bring an education faculty member from South Africa to Dordt.
- Computer Science Professor Kari Sandouka received a $10,000 grant from the National Center for Women and Information Technology for creating academic programs focused on recruiting and retaining women in computing.
- Dr. Robbin Eppinga and colleagues received a $25,000 grant from the Science and Theology for Emerging Adult Ministries (STEAM) program to develop materials to engage young adults in issues of science and faith.

Visit the Dordt website for more comprehensive news stories about these projects.

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— Dr. Nathan Tintle, director for research and scholarship