Dordt Receives Noyce Grant for STEM Education

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Dordt received the largest grant in Dordt’s history—a $1.2 million Noyce grant from the National Science Foundation.

The Noyce grant aims to alleviate the shortage of K-12 STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) teachers nationwide by making teaching a more financially viable career path. Nationwide, the grants provide more than $800,000 in scholarships for prospective teachers.

Mathematics Professor Dr. Valorie Zonnefeld first looked into Noyce grants when she first came to Dordt, but she thought it would be a longshot. All of the schools who previously received the grant were prestigious universities.

But in 2014, Dr. Nathan Tintle, director of research and scholarship, suggested that despite the odds, they give it a shot and apply.

A team was formed with Zonnefeld as principal investigator and lead author. Education Professor Dr. Ryan Zonnefeld refined and wrote sections related to Dordt’s teacher preparation program. Mathematics Professor Dr. Tom Clark and Biology Professor Dr. Jeff Ploegstra reviewed the draft, bringing insights from their disciplines and teaching experience. Tintle’s extensive experience in grant writing helped strengthen the proposal.

The fifteen-page proposal took almost a year to write. After submitting it, the team heard nothing for three months.

Then, in late December, an email came asking some clarification questions.

“At that point, Nathan knew—we had it,” says Valorie Zonnefeld.

As it turned out, the program officer told the team that their proposal was the best of the review panel had seen and that it had circulated around the National Science Foundation.

So how was Dordt able to compete against major universities? The answer is in the painstakingly-crafted proposal, which took an approach that the NSF had not seen—it targeted rural schools in contrast to most proposals that target urban populations.

“The majority of Dordt students come from small schools and districts, and the majority of them go back into a small school. Sometimes you have one science teacher in the whole school,” says Valorie Zonnefeld. “In the proposal, we said that we are training ‘backbone STEM teachers’—teachers who will step in and fill this role for rural schools.”

Dordt’s scholarships will be available for five years, which means that students who are currently high school juniors and seniors could receive $15,000 toward their educational expenses. After graduation, they would have to teach for two years in a high-needs school.

“If you love math and science, teaching is a profession where you get to do that every day,” says Clark. “But you also have the power to affect kids’ lives, to train them for the future. It’s meaningful work. These scholarships help students realize that dream with minimal debt. Go to the website, talk with us. This is an incredible opportunity.”

To learn more about Dordt’s Noyce scholarships, whether as a student or a school seeking to hire Dordt STEM teacher graduates, visit www.dordt.edu/dc-noyce-scholars.