Pro-Tech: A Year in Review

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**PRO-TECH: A YEAR IN REVIEW**

Dordt’s new, two-year vocational program concluded its first year in May. Students in the Pro-Tech program take classroom courses and participate in an internship, working two full days a week and doing the same shift as a company employee.

Pro-Tech students take 24 credits of core classes—about half of what is required for a four-year program. Just eight weeks into the program, the internships begin. For Bryce Hiemstra, from Manteca, California, this meant operating robotic welders at Demco in Boyden, Iowa while living on Dordt’s campus and enjoying the benefits of a residential college experience.

Ivan Hoogland of Longmont, Colorado, spent the year studying farm operations and management. He interned at Summit Dairy and learned everything from cow vaccination to strategies for managing an agricultural business. He also participated in Bible studies, study groups, and intramural sports at Dordt.

“It’s been amazing to watch students grow through their work,” says Tom Colarossi, farm operations professor. “They mature in ways they don’t even see themselves. After two years, we want them to be confident in their abilities when they go back home to farm or begin their careers in production agriculture.”

“For a program that started as just an idea, we accomplished a great deal in one year: implementing courses, certifying students, equipping labs, and placing students in internships,” says Oscar Rodriguez, who teaches manufacturing technology. “There are things we plan to streamline and change, but overall it was a really good year.”

“You run into things at work that go further than what you learned in the textbook,” says Colarossi. “You have to solve a problem, treat a sick animal, fix a piece of broken machinery. Internships give students frontline opportunities to apply what they’ve learned in class.”

For Dr. Joel Sikkema, director of Pro-Tech, the program is about serviceable insight, the combining of classroom knowledge and practical action. He was pleased with how the internships went.

“Taking that number of students and matching them with the right opportunity is not an easy task,” he says. “We try to figure out what the needs of the world are in ag and manufacturing, and how our students’ strengths and passions can be used to address those needs.”

“We want to equip our students to be part of Christ’s reconciliatory work in all different parts of creation,” says Sikkema, who says that there is a gap in the Christian higher education landscape in agriculture. “Pro-Tech is designed to help students fill those needs. Our goal is to mentor them, shape them, and then send them back to their farms and ranches and companies, to serve others to the glory of God.”

KATE HENRECKSON

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**READY TO GROW**

With a new $255,000 grant from the National Science Foundation as well as a new building at Dordt’s Ag Stewardship Center, Pro-Tech’s possibilities continue to increase.

"On any given day at my internship, I could be cleaning water troughs, milking, or vaccinating cows,” says Ivan Hoogland.

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Bryce Hiemstra uses a robotic welder at Demco, a company that specializes in agriculture, RV towing, and trailer products. "Back in high school, I never would have thought that I’d be operating robotic welders," he says. "My co-workers are helpful, and I’m learning quickly."