

Core Program Gets a Refresh

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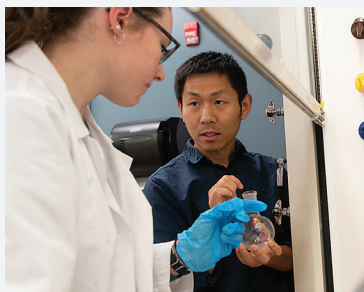
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FACULTY NOTES

Professor of History **Dr. Scott Culpepper** contributed the chapter "Faith and Reason behind the Throne: Francis Bacon's Integral Correlation of Religious Conviction and Inductive Curiosity" to the book *Faith and Reason in the Reformations*. He also contributed the chapter "Paranoia, the Hive Mind, and Empowered Sisterhood: *American Horror Story's* Trump-Haunted World" to the upcoming book *American Television during a Television Presidency*.



At the American College Theatre Festival, Professor of Theatre **Dr. Teresa Ter Haar** received a Certificate of Merit for Direction of the theatre production *The Diviners*.



Professor of Chemistry **Dr. Joshua Zhu** was awarded a \$350,916 grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for pharmacology, physiology, and biological chemistry research.

Professor of Mathematics **Dr. Valorie Zonnefeld** and Professor of Education **Dr. Ryan Zonnefeld** co-presented at three conferences. They presented "Competitions Promoting the Mathematical Sciences" at the NCTM Virtual Meeting and Exposition in Atlanta, and at the 14th International Congress of Mathematics Education in Beijing, China. "Building a University-School Partnership" was also presented at the conference in Beijing.



Moss: Core Program Gets a Refresh



JAMIN VER VELDE '99

In addition to his Core Program work, Dr. Jeff Ploegstra is a professor of biology at Dordt.

CORE PROGRAM GETS A REFRESH

The Core Program has long been at the heart of what makes a Dordt education distinctive.

Core courses are ones that all students must take to graduate, such as Biblical Foundations, Roots of Western Culture, and Advanced Reformed Thought. Dordt's Core Program has five goals for students: (a) exhibit a joyful commitment to living out Christ's Word, (b) understand and apply the distinct Reformed biblical perspective, (c) practice critical thinking skills, (d) evaluate Western culture and contemporary global development, and (e) participate as agents of God's peace within his deeply interconnected creation. Each course tries to embody these goals to work toward Dordt's mission "to equip students to work toward Christ-centered renewal in all aspects of contemporary life."

Core Program Director Dr. Jeff Ploegstra believes that core courses continue to be a strong foundation for each student's education, but he feels that students increasingly seem to view the courses with a checklist mentality,

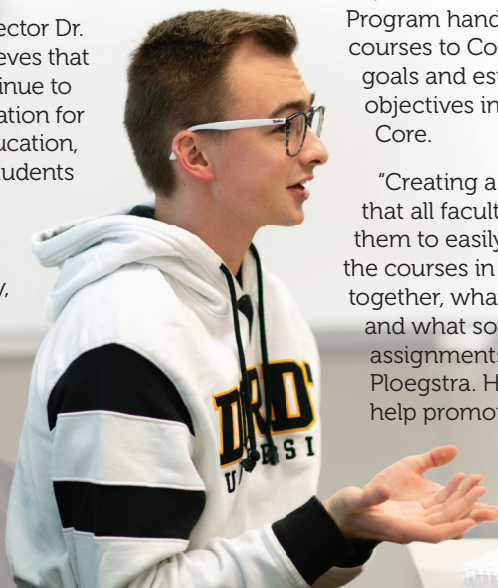
Jake Thorsteinson is a senior studying biology at Dordt.

something they must get out of the way. After conducting focus groups and gathering feedback, he learned that most students don't even know that the Core Program's five goals exist. So he began to think about a Core Program refresh, working with the Core Program Committee, the Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Leah Zuidema, the Dean of Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Teresa Ter-Haar, and a handful of students.

"We have been working to clarify the structure and value of the Core and to improve connections between our assessments of student development and our curriculum and pedagogy," says Ploegstra.

First, the team created a Core Program handbook that connects courses to Core Program learning goals and establishes learning objectives in each segment of the Core.

"Creating a living document that all faculty can access helps them to easily understand how the courses in the Core Program fit together, what the objectives are, and what some of the common assignments are," explains Ploegstra. He believes it will help promote fidelity to the Core



objectives and help connect courses within the Core.

As part of their process, the group used assessment information to identify opportunities for improvement of student learning and experience in the Core. They also developed materials—including videos, a webpage, and infographics—that clearly communicate the Core Program goals.

The materials are helpful for describing what a Dordt education includes to donors and students.

"The development and church relations team have shared these materials with supporters, and Core 100 instructors have been using them to help incoming students understand the structure and value of the Core," adds Ploegstra.

When Senior Jake Thorsteinson heard about the Core Program refresh, he asked Ploegstra if he could get involved.

"I care a lot about Dordt and the opportunity that the Core Program has for shaping and growing me and the rest of the students," he says. "I've experienced some of the most joyful and deep learning in some of my Core classes—moments that resulted in FaceTime calls home to excitedly share the faith-related ideas I just gleaned from my professors. However, I also know that I've felt the least learning in some of my Core classes—the dread of having to attend something that you know probably has potential but isn't showing it."

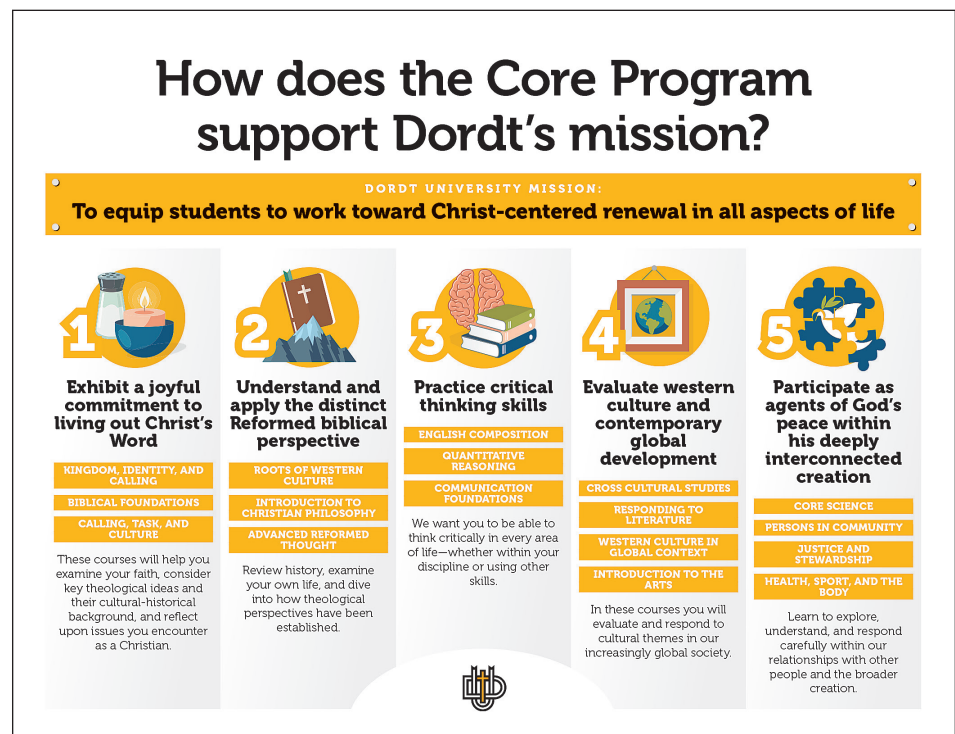
As a member of Student Government, Thorsteinson used that platform for change. He and others in Student Government held focus groups that used a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) of the Core Program, offering students a free dinner at the Commons if they shared their thoughts.

"We led discussions, took notes, compiled the results, and presented them to Student Government, the Core Program Committee, and a staff seminar over the summer," says Thorsteinson.

Ploegstra has taken that student

“The Core Program lays a foundation for thinking critically about all of life as worship, as participation in the redemptive work of God in the world.”

— Dr. Jeff Ploegstra, Core Program director



This handout that uses visuals to explain how the Core Program supports Dordt's mission has been shared with faculty and students.

feedback and applied it to the Core Program refresh.

English Professor Dr. Bob De Smith previously served as Core Program Director and has taught plenty of Core courses over the years, from English

"People graduating from Dordt are more than their career. The Core Program lays a foundation for thinking critically about all of life as worship, as participation in the redemptive work of God in the world," says Ploegstra. "We don't just want people who are skillful; we are seeking to develop whole people who find joy in serving God and loving their neighbors, people who are as interested in asking important questions as in stating their opinion or winning an argument."

Thorsteinson agrees that it is important for Dordt to be intentional about the Core Program, because the opportunity is so huge.

"The potential to develop deep-thinking students across every major who will go into their churches and become elders, into their jobs and become managers, and into their families and become role-models is something we can't ignore," he says. "College is incredibly formative, and if we can educate students to incorporate their faith into their lives with the tenacity that a Reformed worldview demands, Dordt graduates have the possibility of being people who truly live inspirationally different."

SARAH MOSS ('10)