

Dordt's Enrollment Reaches New High

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DORDT'S ENROLLMENT REACHES NEW HIGH

Dordt University's overall enrollment for the fall 2022 semester is 1,858—the largest enrollment in Dordt's history, exceeding the fall 2021 record of 1,786 students. This includes a record total degree-seeking undergraduate enrollment of 1,460.

Senior Karly Gustafson can tell that Dordt is experiencing record enrollment this year. Sure, there have been times where she's stood in long lines at the Grille and in the Commons around lunch and supper time. Aside from that, she's excited to see campus bustling.

LOOKING BACK

By comparison, Dordt University enrolled 1,254 total students in 2005.

"At chapel on Wednesdays, the B.J. Haan Auditorium is filled with students who are coming to worship and want to hear God's Word," she says. "It's encouraging to see."

Senior Bethany Ten Haken says she's watched both the cross-country team and the Education Department grow over the past four years.

"All the dorm rooms are filled, and you see a lot more activity, especially in the residence buildings," she says.

What Dordt is experiencing isn't what many other colleges and universities in the United States are experiencing. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, enrollment in the higher education



During Week of Welcome, new students are welcomed by cheering students holding signs that say, "Welcome to Dordt!" or "Honk if you love Dordt!"

industry has steadily declined in recent years. Total enrollment for spring 2022 decreased by 4.1%, with enrollment at the undergraduate level dropping by 4.7%.

What are some of the reasons why Dordt is having record enrollment? What does it mean for Dordt's future, and what does record enrollment have to do with the value of a Dordt education?

WHY DORDT IS EXPERIENCING RECORD ENROLLMENT

There are many reasons why Dordt has record enrollment again this year. Jim Bos, registrar and director of institutional research, attributes Dordt's record enrollment in part to consistent retention—that is, the number of students who re-enroll year after year—across the student body.

"Our freshmen-to-sophomore retention rate is 80.4%, which is average for Dordt," says Bos. "What we've seen is that more sophomores and juniors have chosen to stay at Dordt, including students pursuing associate degrees who decide to continue on to complete their bachelor's degrees."

What makes Dordt students want to enroll and stay? It's that Dordt offers truth in advertising, says Director of Admissions Greg Van Dyke. He, the admissions team, and third party partner Fuller Higher Ed Solutions polled students who had been admitted to Dordt regarding what they were looking to gain from a college education. Three aspects stood out.

"High school students say they want a Christ-centered university where they're going to grow in their faith. They want a strong community on campus, and they want academic programs where they're going to get a job when they graduate," says Van Dyke.

These results align with what Van Dyke sees as three of Dordt's greatest strengths.

"Students have ample opportunities to grow in their faith by going to chapel services, Bible studies, Praise and Worship, and classes that are taught from a Christian perspective," he says. "The community aspect is what Dordt students talk about all the time; when they're asked to describe Dordt, they often say, 'community.'"

JAMIN VER VELDE (99)



"Having record enrollment again this year gives our admissions team confidence as we go out on the road. Students want to be here, and they see the value in this place. They're excited, and so are we," says Greg Van Dyke.

66 "We're being honest about who Dordt is and what our students experience on campus. And high school students are opting into that."

— Greg Van Dyke

And when it comes to strong academics and career potential, Van Dyke points to the fact that 100% of Dordt's class of 2021 were either employed or in graduate school within six months of graduation.

"It's important for the admissions office to communicate what is actually happening on campus, and we seek to do that," adds Van Dyke. "We're being honest about who Dordt is and what our students experience on campus. And high school students are opting into that."

Vice President for Enrollment and Marketing Brandon Huisman agrees that Dordt is bringing in the type of students

who want to earn a Christ-centered education. Record enrollment also brings with it a sense of momentum. "Students, faculty, and staff want to be part of what God is doing here. And students want to be around our faculty and staff who are investing in them."

When it comes to why more students are deciding to stay at Dordt for their entire college education, Huisman says two reasons come to his mind.

"The first one is systems; you must have people in place so that students can learn well, get into the classes they need to, and graduate on time. Whether it's the Financial Aid Office making sure students know what scholarships are available to them or the Registrar's Office ensuring that students sign up for the right classes in the proper order, Dordt students get individualized attention thanks to the great systems and people who work here."

The second is belonging. "Dordt students know they belong here, and once you belong, you want to stay there and see it through," says Huisman. "We want students to feel holistically supported in all areas of their student development and growth—spiritually, academically, socially, mentally, and physically."

Ultimately, though, he thinks Dordt's record enrollment comes down to missional fidelity.

"Does a school know who it is that they say they are and why they exist? For Dordt, I think a lot of our missional fidelity is a credit to the way our board, faculty, staff, students, and president all work together as office-bearers. It's how we use Dordt's *Educational Task of Dordt University* as our why—why do we do this work? Why does it matter in this time and place?"

The Educational Task of Dordt University is an 18-page statement of purpose that describes how a Reformed confession of biblical faith impacts Christian higher education. It's been called the lynchpin of a Dordt education, a document that "provides the gravitational pull to align all our activities and efforts at Dordt in the same direction," says President Erik Hoekstra.

One way that Dordt displays missional fidelity is through intentional hiring practices, says Huisman. To apply for an open position, faculty and staff must submit a personal statement where, in addition to expressing their religious convictions, they read and

respond to *The Educational Task of Dordt University* as well as the four curricular coordinates derived from the framework: religious orientation, creational structure, creational development, and contemporary response. The personal statement is considered as important as a resume, cover letter, or personal references during the hiring process.

This, along with other practices, helps to ensure that Dordt employees have a strong understanding of Dordt's mission and vision, and how they are expected to live that out.

"The Educational Task of Dordt University is a good, healthy

cultural marker of why we're doing well right now, as it shows that we know who we are," says Huisman. "And we have steps in place to continue educating the next generation to carry that torch."

MAKING MORE ROOM ON DORDT'S CAMPUS

It's exciting to be at an institution where the community is thriving, says Associate Dean of Students and Director of Residence Life Derek Buteyn.



EDUCATIONAL TASK OF DORDT

Find Dordt's Educational Task at dordt.edu/task.



JAMIN VER VELDE (99)



Brandon Huisman says it is important to look at Dordt's record enrollment with both humility and confidence. "By God's grace, we get to talk about this," he says.

"At a time when there is growing opportunity to complete a degree entirely online, students are voting with their feet and saying they care about being in a residential learning environment," he says.

Living on campus is a significant part of the Dordt experience. "We're unique in that 90% of Dordt undergraduates live on campus in student housing," Buteyn says. "In recent years, it's become noticeable that Dordt has grown. We've had to be more creative in how we efficiently house students—to maximize our space but not negatively impact their living experience."

That's where Howard Wilson, vice president for university operations, comes in. He likes to say that his basic job description is "keeping the doors open and the lights on so that Dordt University can fulfill its mission," and part of that includes making sure Dordt has enough student housing.

This past summer, Dordt added more dorm and apartment space, including renovating the lower level of Covenant Hall—a women's dorm on the east end of campus—to provide dorm rooms for 16 additional students.

"We had some underutilized space down there, since we had relocated Student Health and Counseling to the Campus

JAMIN VER VELDE (99)



"We are using more of everything, from paper towels to parking spaces," says Howard Wilson. "We can definitely sense that there are more people on campus."

Center," says Wilson.

The renovation ended up being relatively easy since the infrastructure was all there. Construction started in February and finished in early August, just in time for students to move in.

"Each room has about six lineal feet of closet space per resident. There are bigger windows than upstairs," he says. "It seems to be a win-win all around, and it used space that we hadn't been using efficiently."

Dordt is considering other opportunities for expanding housing in the future.

"We want to be prudent as we consider if we should or shouldn't add new facilities, as we don't know what the future holds. So we're considering how any new buildings might be multipurpose, in case we don't see record enrollment in future years," explains Wilson.

More students on campus also means more cars. A new parking lot behind Kuyper and Southview Apartments has helped to remedy the shortage of on-campus parking.

"In the past two years, students have brought about 350 more vehicles to campus," says Wilson. "This past summer, we added 327 spaces. We are at the edge of capacity for student parking, so we're looking at adding even more parking this upcoming year."



A bird's eye view of Covenant Hall reveals the large window well constructed to make room for additional dorm space.

“At a time when there is growing opportunity to complete a degree entirely online, students are voting with their feet and saying they care about being in a residential learning environment”

— Derek Buteyn

On-campus dining will soon get an overhaul as well, helping alleviate the long lines Gustafson and fellow students are experiencing.

"The Commons is about 60 years old, and there aren't enough seats in the building to comfortably feed residential students," says Wilson.

The new dining hall will connect the Campus Center and the B.J. Haan Auditorium with a skywalk. The space will be able to hold around 400 people for meal service at a time and will provide more capacity for food

preparation and dishwashing facilities.

"Dining has become one of our pinch points on campus, so having a new dining space will be vitally important," says Wilson.

Construction of the dining hall is set to begin in late 2023, with the first meals being served in 2025.

THE VALUE OF A DORDT EDUCATION

Gustafson believes record enrollment shows how well Dordt "is doing as an institution."

"I think the high enrollment that Dordt is experiencing is because of the Christian education it provides, along with a welcoming atmosphere and an amazing community that supports you during your time here," she says.

Ten Haken says Dordt feels like a "home away from home" to her.

"The professors truly want you to succeed and will go out of their way to help you. Coaches really support you in all your endeavors, whether it's through academics, athletics, or spiritual growth. Dordt is doing great, which makes students want to come here and stay."

"In a God-glorifying way, we're proud of what we're doing here at Dordt. We're helping students discover who it is that God created them to be. As Christians, that's what we're called to do here," says Van Dyke.

"I'm most excited that we are inviting students, and they're opting in," says Huisman. "They are seeing the quality of a Dordt education and the value that we provide students. We're fulfilling our mission and vision. We're helping students to graduate on time and, in some cases, early."

When high school students and their parents visit Dordt, Buteyn hopes they experience the "realness" of Dordt – that "we are who we say we are."

"We're authentic about our faith, and we're committed to student learning," he says. "Students see Dordt as a place where they'll be known and cared for, where they'll grow in their faith, and where they'll be invested in and equipped as a whole person."

SARAH MOSS ('10)

INCREASED PERSONAL CARE

With a larger student body comes increased individualized needs, whether that be physical needs, emotional or mental health concerns, dietary needs, or more.

"We've noticed an uptick in students' need for mental health support. Students are identifying their need for emotional and mental health support earlier on, which is a positive thing," says Buteyn. "Our office has worked to provide access to and opportunities for support through additional pastoral care counselors, expanded services in the Student Health and Counseling center, and more drop-in sessions with our mental health counselors."

Student Services has also spent a significant amount of time training residence life staff to identify and refer students who are struggling to appropriate on-campus resources.