

Dr. Kari Sandouka

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Dr. Kari Sandouka works with Institutional Research at Dordt, where she and Registrar Jim Bos track data to help faculty and administrators make informed decisions that will help further Dordt's mission. Sandouka's primary focus relates to program reviews: every five years, an academic department does a deep dive into their respective programs, and she provides them with the data they need to do so. She pulls data from admissions, examining how many high school students came for a campus visit, how many applied to Dordt, and how many ended up enrolling. She compares a program's data to the overall Dordt data.

"We look at the number of majors and break that down by gender or class rank. We look at faculty members—who has been teaching classes, are they full-time or adjunct, and what is the student-to-faculty ratio," she explains. "Another important aspect is student responses. At the end of the semester, students fill out an evaluation. I take that data and create an aggregate data view, where we can get a five-year summary of scores."

All this information goes to a department conducting a five-year program review. The goal is to help each department make sure that their program is providing good outcomes and that students in the program are succeeding.

"By conducting institutional research, we want to help departments make good decisions—not ones based on gut instinct but through data-driven decision-making," says Sandouka. "Maybe it helps to provide a justification for why a department should add another faculty member, or maybe it helps a department chair recognize patterns."

To Sandouka, her work in Institutional

Research is about numerical and visual storytelling. "I don't provide the words, but I see the numbers and patterns that help to frame the stories that departments want to tell," she says.

Her Ph.D. research involved visualizations and how to tell a story correctly. That experience shines through in the work she is doing with Bos. "There are theories of how color and symbols affect how you interpret the data," she says. "With program reviews or board reports, I'll spend weeks trying to find the right chart to make the data interesting."

"In my field, we talk about how if you put context around raw data, you get information. The more information you learn, you become knowledgeable. And the more knowledgeable you are, you get wisdom," she explains. "But even when you become wiser, there's so much data coming in that it becomes a cycle."

Take, for example, the increase in female students in the computer science program. When Sandouka started teaching at Dordt 12 years ago, she was the only female in the program. Now, the program has seen a 40 percent increase in female students.

"The numbers can tell me that female enrollment jumped, but it can't tell me why," explains Sandouka. "We can look at the context and see that barriers within the technology field are lowering, girls are more interested in computer science, and more."

Sandouka's work with Institutional Research doesn't end with creating and sending reports. She continually returns to the data to consider what else can be learned.

"It's a different way to conduct research, but it's still about having a good question and trying to find ways to answer it," she says.

Dr. Kari Sandouka

PROFESSOR OF COMPUTER SCIENCE



ALUMNI NOTES

Daniel Zylstra ('05) completed a Doctorate in Educational Leadership degree from Indiana University in Bloomington. His dissertation topic was on recruitment and retention of school bus drivers in small, rural schools. He currently serves as the head of schools at Pella Christian Schools.

T. Ryan Lane ('04) is the newly elected minority leader of the New Mexico House of Representatives. He is also the city attorney of Bloomfield, New Mexico, as well as the co-owner of an ice cream shop called Vanilla Moose in Aztec, New Mexico.



Bill Boerman-Cornell ('04) recently co-authored *Young Adult Literature and Spirituality: How to Unlock Deeper Understanding with Class Discussion*, published by Rowman and Littlefield. The book suggests that readers can look at young adult books as "prayers of lament, yearning, anger, confession, thankfulness, reconciliation, joy, and more."



Tim Ives ('03) was named Iowa's Cross Country High School Coach of the Year. He coached the boys' cross country team at Dowling Catholic High School, who were the 2022 State Champions.

In November, **Laurie** (Hoogeveen, '01)

Covington was appointed as Senior Vice President—Enterprise Strategic Planning at Homesteaders Life. She earned her bachelor's degree in English literature from Dordt and an MBA from the University of Iowa Tippie College of Business. She joined Homesteaders in 2012 as Director of Application Development.

