



The Educational Task of Dordt University

Preface

As an institution of higher education committed to the Reformed, Christian perspective, Dordt University equips students, alumni, and the broader community to work effectively toward Christ-centered renewal in all aspects of contemporary life.

Under the supervision of the board of trustees, the Dordt faculty has written and adopted a statement of purpose describing how a **Reformed** confession of biblical faith impacts Christian higher education.

All who are associated with Dordt pledge to prayerfully pursue the purposes outlined

in this document as we engage together in educating God's covenant people for faithful service in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The first such statement, adopted in 1961, consisted of seventeen propositions to guide the development of the educational program. A more detailed statement was later formulated in 1968 titled *Scripturally-Oriented Higher Education*. Between 1979 and 1996, *The Educational Task of Dordt University* was developed and adopted. In 2015, a committee was charged with updating the language of the document and renewing a commitment of ownership among a new generation of campus faculty and staff. In 2018, after three years of revision and renewal, the Board of Trustees approved *The Educational Task* in its current form. This document now serves as the biblically-based, confessional foundation for the entire academic enterprise of Dordt.

Introduction

This document sets forth the principles that direct Dordt University in performing its educational task.

Dordt was established and is sustained by a Reformed, Christian community dedicated to the meaningful expression of biblical principles in education. Those who first showed interest in founding a college in Northwest Iowa stated their vision in a 1937 report submitted by Classis Ostfriesland (now Classis Northcentral Iowa) of the Christian Reformed Church:

That Classis Ostfriesland invite Classis Pella, Minnesota, Orange City, and Sioux Center to join with us in working towards the organization, support and control of a Christian junior college in harmony with Reformed principles. The aim of such a junior college is to give young people an education that is Christian, not merely in the sense that devotional exercises are appended to the ordinary work of the college, but in the larger and deeper sense that all the class work, all the students' intellectual, emotional, and imaginative activities shall be permeated with the spirit and teaching of Christianity.

This foundational biblical perspective was further articulated in successive directional documents of Dordt:

In the training and development of the redeemed in Christ, the Holy Scriptures are basic, since they are indispensable to the proper realization of the individual's capacities and the proper fulfilling of his responsibilities. All education must be scripturally oriented. (*Educational Task of Dordt University*—Adopted in 1961, Proposition #9)

The covenant parent recognizes the school, formal education, as the second sphere vital to the fulfillment of his task. In agreement with his covenantal-kingdom philosophy, he demands an education for his child that is scripturally oriented. (*Scripturally-Oriented Higher Education*, 1968, p. 26)

This educational commitment, a key aspect of a Reformed worldview, determines Dordt's principles, purpose, and direction.

The educational task is the responsibility of the entire Dordt community. The faculty play a central role in defining and implementing it. Working under the supervision of the board of trustees, faculty and staff must remain sensitive to the religious perspective and insights of the supporting community. Applying their gifts of Christian scholarship, faculty must also lead the broader community to a growing understanding of the demands of a Reformed **world and life view**.

At Dordt University, we confess
that the Bible is the inspired
Word of God, his infallible and
authoritative revelation.

It reveals God's good **creation**, the radical
fall into sin, the total **redemption** in Jesus
Christ, and the **fullness** (shalom) of the
kingdom in the age to come. The Bible
reveals to us the Word become flesh, Jesus
Christ, who is the key to understanding



brought about by sin and centuries of idolatry. This situation makes the work of Christian education both challenging and crucial.

As an institution of higher learning, Dordt is called to the task of Christian

higher education. We seek to equip our constituents with Christian insight, developing and implementing Christian learning that benefits students, alumni, and the broader Christian community.

Chapter 3: Structure

Participating in the educational task of Dordt University is to be understood as a calling.

When disciples of Christ hear and accept God's call to participate in the task of Dordt University, they occupy a variety of offices.¹ Due to a diversity of tasks, Dordt has historically recognized five kinds of office: board members are elected; professors, staff, and the president are appointed; and students enroll in the work of the educational community. However, it should be noted that there is not an exclusive identity of office with any one person, and that a person can occupy more than one office. Office-bearers, endowed with God-given competence and insight, are authorized to take part in the educational task of Dordt and should discharge the specific responsibilities of their office in a spirit of selfless obedience to God, fellow office-bearers, and the mission of the university.²

Participating in the work of developing and sharing insight is not merely an occupation or a means to gain financial security or self-esteem, but a task to which God calls us.³

When this sense of office consciousness is

lostai(s)-3.72.2 (a)8 (t)-l41P5124 (e c)-1.5a8d2-17.4 (s)-l Td8m (sh2 (a)8 e)6 Tmr.9 (r)14f4 (e2-1or(9 (r)14.8 (i),d[(D)1

educational calling which pervades every segment and activity of Dordt. Though these tasks are similar in their response to the

Chapter 4: Authority

All authority is given by God and is therefore always delegated and representative.¹

It is given to serve humanity and the whole of creation. At Dordt University, each office is associated with a specific kind of authority and must be exercised in servanthood.

The goal of authority within Dordt is to enable and encourage office-bearers to perform their tasks as fully and effectively as possible in response to the will of the Lord. This authority is not to be used to dominate or exercise presumed rights; rather it must be exercised to serve, facilitate, and edify.²

Every office-bearer has the responsibility to serve others, empowering them by ensuring their freedom to carry out their task and exercise their authority. A biblical understanding of authority requires a spirit of mutual responsibility and accountability before God.³

The board possesses the authority to make and implement wise, insightful decisions that affect the direction of the entire educational enterprise. Normally the board entrusts the day-to-day operation of Dordt to the other office-bearers. However, if the board detects a departure from Dordt's mission, it is called and authorized to act.

The faculty is called and authorized to exercise authority over the academic and curricular program. As educational office-bearers they must give evidence of possessing the requisite competence, insight, and expertise which enables and authorizes them to equip students, alumni, and the broader community to work effectively toward Christ-centered renewal in all aspects of contemporary life.

Students exercise a meaningful but more limited authority. They are directly involved in the teaching and learning process, so their insight regarding instruction and the overall life of the university is deeply valued. As this insight develops, it results in increased authority, enabling them to evaluate whether the board, president, faculty, and staff are fulfilling their mandate.

The authority of administrators and staff is determined by their special task of organizing and facilitating the educational process. Their expertise lies in facilitating and cultivating academic, co-curricular, financial, operational, and public relations aspects of the university.

The office of university president includes a broad range of authority for overseeing, guiding, and directing the entire university. As the liaison between the board and the faculty and staff, the president speaks to the faculty and staff with the specific authority of the board; the president speaks to the board with the specific authority of the faculty and staff. The president is responsible

¹ Matthew 28:18; Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 3:22.

² 2 Corinthians 4:5; Philippians 2:3-4.

³ 1 Peter 4:10-11.

to ensure that Dordt functions effectively and efficiently and is authorized to exercise both academic and administrative authority. All office-bearers on the campus, in the performance of their various functions, are accountable to the president, who in turn, is accountable to the board.

Authority on campus is exercised effectively and responsibly when all office-bearers carry out their tasks competently. Office-bearers endowed with educational authority at the curricular and academic heart of the college must show themselves competent in their research and teaching. The administrators and the staff must also be competent to supply an enabling context for the educational process. As leader of the entire institution, the president must have a special measure of experience and understanding.

The proper exercise of authority requires structured and open lines of

communication. Any concerned office-bearer may examine or question procedure, policy decisions, or the university's effectiveness in developing and sharing serviceable insight. Such concerns should not be regarded as failing to submit to authority but as an appropriate testing of the university's activities. However, such questioning should respect the authority of each office and be done in a spirit of communal love.

Dordt recognizes a distinction between arriving at a decision and implementing it. The decision-making process must involve those given the authority to implement a decision as well as those who will be impacted by it. Conflicts and disputes should not be resolved by coercion. Instead, conflict resolution should involve a spirit of love and mutual trust, prompted by the desire to advance Dordt's educational purposes.

The central educational task of Dordt University is to provide Christian insight on an advanced level.

To function effectively in a complex society, Christians require wisdom and understanding. As members of the body of Christ, we are called to spiritual discernment, critical thinking, and wise judgment. In our daily lives, we are continually confronted by the difficulties and problems of our age. National and international tensions enter our homes through the media, political and economic problems touch our everyday lives, and the power of technology and communications affects us all. Christians require an advanced level of insight to engage with these multi-dimensional challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, all callings require a deep knowledge and a broad range of skills.

This situation puts a particularly important responsibility on Christian institutions of higher learning, including Dordt. We are faced with the need to meet continually changing demands. We must not be satisfied with the transmission of abstractions; we must develop and share insight that enables Christians to serve Jesus faithfully. At Dordt, our educational task is to provide insight that is kingdom-oriented and genuinely Christian: serviceable insight. Such insight equips the Christian community to

respond obedientenridssTJ0 -5 (o)1.t i9 (e)6.3 (l)-7ttn8orattunohfisfiermo136-1.2 Td[9 (ey.6 (un)-10.9 (o)1.9 (n)-2

advance, in loving service, the claim of Christ over all areas of life.

Christian insight encompasses an understanding of the structure and working of God's created order, including theoretical knowledge and the practical ability and motivation to carry out one's task in loving obedience and service.

Dordt is called to provide multi-dimensional insight. The Dordt graduate must have theoretical understanding, practical ability and skill, and a passion to be biblically faithful in response to God's call to service. For this reason, theory, practice, and motivation are all integral to the implementation of God's will in everyday situations.

In principle, no legitimate profession, occupation, vocation, or station in life can be precluded from Dordt's educational concern. One goal of the college is to identify those occupational areas where serviceable insight is increasingly needed. Dordt must therefore continually examine the nature and scope of its curriculum and other activities in order to provide high quality learning experiences that are central to its mission and that address crucial needs in society. In this way Dordt, by remaining aware of the demands of the times, can carry out its educational task of providing leadership that

Central to the implementation of the educational task of Dordt University is the curriculum, the basic means for sharing serviceable insight.

The curriculum consists of organized fields of investigation that are reflective of an intentional creational order.

Within the curriculum, four coordinates guide our pursuit. They are: 1) Religious Orientation (Who owns the cosmos and who owns your heart?); 2) Creational Structure (How do things hold together?); 3) Creational Development (How do things unfold?); and 4) Contemporary Response (How are we called to respond?).¹

At Dordt, the dimensions of reality are examined to obtain an understanding of the underlying unity in diversity. We attempt to convey the perspective of an ordered creation continuously upheld by God's Word,² the cosmos in which people are placed and called to carry out their tasks. Dordt stresses the indispensability of biblical study and Christian philosophy to our understanding of the character and coherence of the created order.

Insight into the structure of creation is to be integrally linked to an investigation

While the various disciplines and programs, together with historical and contemporary studies, constitute the core of the curriculum, Dordt by no means neglects to teach the many skills required by graduates as they continue in their calling. Emphases

Dordt University confesses that
the source of true freedom is
Jesus Christ. However, such
freedom is not to be equated

perspectives, and living obediently, all while prophetically working toward shalom. This involves submitting to God's Word as revealed in creation, embodied in the person of Jesus, expounded in the Scriptures, and applied through the ongoing work of the

Holy Spirit and his Church. In doing so, faculty participate in the Reformational tradition of *Semper Reformanda* – Reformed and always being Reformed, according to the Word of God.

Reformed

The Reformed tradition emerged out of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Its early representatives include John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and Theodore Beza. Reformed theology emphasizes the authority and normativity of Scripture and doctrines such as justification by faith alone, the sovereignty of God, infant baptism, and the spiritual (i.e. non-physical) presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Multiple branches of the Reformed tradition now exist across the globe. Dordt University is closely associated (yet not exclusively so) with a Dutch strand of the Reformed tradition, which has historically emphasized the so-called physical presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

Fullness

The fullness of the Kingdom is the consummation of God's redemptive plan for humanity and creation. In the present time, we enjoy a foretaste of God's coming Kingdom, but look forward to the peace and perfection of a future age.

Cosmos

The cosmos is the entirety of all that God has made. There is nothing in the universe that exists that was not created by God.

Covenant

A covenant is a mutual agreement that establishes a fellowship between parties. It is usually accompanied by specific terms and conditions, promising blessings to those who are faithful to the covenant, and specifying penalties for those who violate it. The redemptive covenant between God and humanity accomplishes the salvation of God's people. Through this covenantal relationship, we enjoy an intimate fellowship with our creator, and come to know his will for us.

Office

In any social context, certain individuals will have responsibility to care for the common good of the community. In family life, parents have responsibility to nourish, educate, and protect their children. In ecclesial life, pastors, elders, and deacons are called to minister to their congregation in various ways. We refer to these roles and responsibilities as "offices." At Dordt University, those who hold office (faculty, staff, president, student, or board of trustee) are granted authority to act on behalf of the community in specific ways. If an officeholder acts against the common good of the community, authorized individuals may correct or even remove the individual from his or her office.

Commissions

All authority derives from God. As Christ's disciples,

we are commisr-3.8 (r)7.4 (e c)-7.8 (o)-4.6 (7e1 (o)-16.1 ((t)-19.r (i)0.m)-14.9 (a)7 (y ((t)-19. (m)-678 t)227m48.5 (h)-5.5.8 (e)-10 ()-10

