
Dordt Gets High Marks in Accreditation

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CAMPUS KUDOS

This spring and summer, **Dordt plans to begin several construction projects to help free up more living and learning space as the institution continues to grow.** One such project is the construction of a new set of apartments, located south of Southview Apartments. Yet to be named, the apartments will consist of four new buildings and will house a total of 96 students. The Board of Trustees gave approval for construction of the apartments at a recent meeting. For more information, visit dordt.edu/construction-2023.

The grand opening of the new American State Bank Sports Complex took place on January 20. The indoor turf facility, a joint project of Dordt University and the City of Sioux Center, will host athletic competitions and training, wellness activities, and events. It is anticipated that the complex will draw 200,000 visitors each year. To learn more, visit dordt.edu/asbsc.

The Dordt University Concert Choir released a CD titled "Soli Deo Gloria." Just

before embarking on their music tour to Austria and the Czech Republic, the choir recorded 13 tracks in May 2022 in the B.J. Haan Auditorium. To purchase a copy of the CD, visit the Dordt Campus Store in person or online.



The K&K Dooyema Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation recently launched Project Elevate, an opportunity for Dordt students to assist businesses with innovative business practices from a Christian perspective. "Students get real world experience, and organizations get something done—something they might not have time to do otherwise," says Dale Zevenbergen, center director. "Students get to spend time with business professionals, which provides them with relevant opportunities." To learn more, visit dordt.edu/elevate.

Marcus: Dordt Gets High Marks in Accreditation



JAMIN VERVELDE '99

"We had a great team working on this process, which is important," says Jim Bos.

DORDT GETS HIGH MARKS IN ACCREDITATION

Every 10 years Dordt University, like other accredited institutions, steps through a review process with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

The process has two parts: first, the Dordt team—composed of five faculty and staff—submits what HLC calls five assurance arguments demonstrating that Dordt meets the HLC standards for accreditation. Second, an HLC team composed of five faculty and staff from other universities visits Dordt to meet with faculty and staff, as well as students, to verify that what was written in the report matches what they see on campus.

Dordt submitted its assurance arguments in mid-July, hosted the HLC site visit in October, and received confirmation that it meets HLC standards in February.

"Having Dordt's accreditation reaffirmed for the next 10 years is important because it gives our students access to federal financial aid, and it gives our alumni credibility as they pursue employment and apply to graduate programs," says Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Leah Zuidema ('96), who was one member of Dordt's team, along with Registrar Jim Bos ('85).

The first part of the review process began formally in September 2021, when each member of the Dordt team was assigned to write one assurance argument.

Biology Professor and Core Program Director Dr. Jeff Ploegstra ('99) was assigned the argument on mission.

"Writing the assurance argument was gratifying," says Ploegstra. "It was easy to see how our mission actually informs many parts of campus—not just our curriculum. We did a lot of cross talk to make sure that the argument was coherent, comprehensive, and clear. We worked together to identify arguments and evidence, reviewed each other's sections, collaborated on communication with stakeholders, and organized the site visit from HLC."

In the summer of 2022, the five authors hired Daniel Moe ('22), who is presently studying medicine at the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine, to assemble evidence that supported each claim made in the arguments. Moe had become familiar with the assurance

arguments in the previous year in his role as student body president, during which time the Student Government regularly met with the five authors to give feedback.

"By the end of the process, I had collected more than 600 pieces of evidence—ranging from meeting minutes to survey results to sections of the student handbook—and ultimately cited nearly 400 documents in the final version of the assurance argument," says Moe.

Moe says he enjoyed contributing to a narrative that summarized Dordt University's unique story and educational mission. "Reading the final product powerfully illustrated how much God has blessed Dordt and its community and reminded me what a privilege it was to learn and grow there over the past four years," he adds.

In October, the HLC team spent two days on campus, meeting with Dordt faculty, staff, administrators, and student groups. They held several open sessions for faculty, staff, and students, where anyone could provide information and ask questions.

"The visit made me feel nervous and excited," says Theatre Arts Professor and Dean for Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Teresa Ter Haar, who wrote the argument on teaching and learning. "We had spent so much time researching, gathering evidence, and writing, that

I was excited to finally have our team on-site."

She wondered: would the site-visit team have a campus experience that was consistent with what they wrote? Would they need more information, and how quickly?

"I was encouraged when the peer reviewers remarked that each interaction they had during their visit consistently revealed how the mission and vision of Dordt permeates our work," says Ter Haar.

Education Professor Dr. Ryan Zonnefeld ('97), who wrote the argument on academic assessment, found the same response. "The peer reviewers showed a deep appreciation and recognition of how evident Dordt's mission is in everything we do. A report like this not only affirms the excellence of what we are doing, but also propels us to continue in excellence," he adds.

Dordt is not a perfect institution, says Ploegstra. "But I do think we work hard to have an accurate sense of our strengths and weaknesses, and we are constantly working to adapt and improve. I am always thankful for the people that I get to work with—faculty, staff, and students. By and large, we all take our roles seriously and understand that we are part of a larger community that is trusting us to carry out our calling with fidelity, diligence, and love."

Bos, who has been through the accreditation process three times over the last 30 years, finds the accreditation process both insightful and complex.

"Having to be accountable to an accrediting agency helps institutions like Dordt reflect on the overall operation of the institution in ways that we don't usually do in our day-to-day work," he says. "It lets us step back and look at the broader institution and ask, 'Are we really doing what we say we're doing?'"

Trying to explain in 35,000 words what makes Dordt unique while also answering prescribed questions initially seemed like a daunting task, but the team succeeded in their endeavor. In their 65-page accreditation report, the HLC team wrote that "Dordt is an institution that is deeply committed to its mission, and the team would like to acknowledge that this was apparent in every interaction with campus stakeholders."

"The institution's primary strength is its deep and abiding commitment to its mission and providing a positive and uplifting learning environment for its students," wrote the team.

The team also highlighted Dordt's "high-quality facilities and upkeep of the campus grounds."

So, once again, Dordt has met the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) standards for accreditation—this time, at the highest level.

"In every category, the standards were 'met with no concerns,'" says Zuidema. "Our understanding is that this isn't so common among higher education institutions."

"It is encouraging that the visitors recognized that every person they interacted with—students, faculty, staff, and others—were exceedingly clear and in alignment with Dordt's Christ-centered mission," says President Erik Hoekstra. "The evidence we provided in our report clearly showed that we are doing good work together in pursuit of that mission. I want to thank our campus leaders who crafted the report and hosted our visitors. We are grateful that Dordt has been reaffirmed for another 10 years as an accredited institution."

JAMIN VERVELDE (99)



Dr. Teresa Ter Haar serves as a theatre arts faculty member in addition to her work as Dean of Curriculum and Instruction.

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