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Keizer takes the torch as new Athletics Director

Audra Kooi – Staff Writer

On June 21, 2023, Dordt University announced that Ross Douma would be leaving his position as the Director of Athletics for a job as the President of Avail Academy in Edina, Minn. Since Douma’s departure in December, Trent Roose been fulfilling the responsibilities. Now Dordt has announced that Dr. Darin Keizer will be the newest Director of Athletics.

Keizer grew up in Hull, IA and attended Dordt from 2006 to 2010 as a soccer player. His time at Dordt shaped Keizer into who he is today.

“Craig Heynen, Jeff Schouten, Mike Byker, Craig Stiemsma—all these people were very influential in my journey, and that’s why it’s really fun that I get to go back and hopefully be that instrumental piece to kids in their journey,” Keizer said.

For the last ten years, Keizer has worked as the Athletic Director at Southwest Christian High School in Chaska, Minnesota. Here Keizer received the Bound Athletic Director of Influence Award in Minnesota, which is only one marker of his success in this role. He started several athletic programs at Southwest Christian and raised funds for an \$18 million campaign.

“There’s an innate hunger in Darin to grow things and maximize their excellence,” said Dordt’s chief of staff Aaron Baart, who served as chair of the hiring committee “His peers and other people who understand the complexity of the work have a deep sense of admiration for him.”



The Keizer Family

This drive is one of the biggest things Keizer brings to Dordt.

“I want to bring a level of pride where when people walk into Dordt, they hold themselves with a measure of confidence,” Keizer said. “I want to say that we are accomplishing

great things because God is empowering us to accomplish them, and I want our coaches to know that they are empowered to do that.”

Keizer’s empowerment mindset is not unique to Southwest Christian or Dordt; he is the director of Coaching for Transformation, an

organization that helps schools rethink sports in a way that glorifies God.

“It is like the Defender Way—Dordt doesn’t hire coaches just to win; Dordt hires coaches to change lives,” Keizer said. “Coaching for Transformation is a way that we can rescript, rethink, and reshape a school’s way of thinking so they can go back to the foundational principles of their institution to say, ‘this is why this institution exists.’”

*“I want to say that we are accomplishing great things because God is empowering us to accomplish them.”
- Dr. Darin Keizer*

Following the nature of his work, Keizer is a sports fan, keeping up with the Vikings, Hawkeyes, Twins, and the Wild.

Keizer returns to the Sioux Center area with his wife, Jenna, and their two young boys Landon and Coen. The Kaizer family loves playing games, being social, and anything that involves being active—no surprise there.

“My wife and I are incredibly thrilled to be joining Dordt University, and we’re excited to serve in a way that goes beyond Dordt Athletics.” Keizer said.

Photo credit: Darin Keizer

Dordt launches Master of Business program



Paige Corkill—Staff Writer

Starting fall 2024, Dordt University will begin its new Master of Business Administration program. The program will be fully online, and the 36 required credits can be completed in two years.

The planning for the MBA program started about three years ago by a combination of business, accounting, and economics faculty members who saw a need and wanted to fill it.

“A master’s in business administration is the second most popular master’s degree that Dordt alumni pursue,” said Joe Bakker, dean for online, graduate, and partner programs. Now, students will be able to pursue the degree at Dordt.

The program will be available and useful to not just those with business undergrad degrees. “An MBA is a versatile degree. We often

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New Grounds brings new beginnings

Mylia Wagenaar – Staff Writer

On Tuesday, Jan. 30, New Grounds Coffee Co. opened its doors wide to the community. It’s a refresh for the building, which previously housed Butler’s Coffee Shop. But for owner and Dordt University graduate Gracie Dykstra, it’s a brand-new beginning.

Dykstra grew up in the area and attended Dordt for a two-year administrative assistant program. While at Dordt, she began thinking about starting her own business.

“I just couldn’t see myself sitting in an office all day,” Dykstra said.

She had a specific venture in mind.

“It was always a coffee shop,” Dykstra said.

After graduating, Dykstra worked at Habitué Coffeehouse & Bakery in Le Mars for a year and half, gaining prime experience as a barista. She spotted an opportunity to pursue her dream when the Butler’s space became available, but was hesitant.

“I didn’t expect to do it so soon,” said Dykstra. “But here I am.”

Dykstra revamped the space to create New Grounds. The décor is clean and bright. Plants hang in the windows. Music plays softly beneath the whir of the espresso machine. A large banner on the wall reads, “You’re about to be given new grounds for believing.” This verse, John 11:15, was the inspiration for the shop and its name.

While at Dordt, Dykstra received a note of encouragement about “breaking new grounds.”



Gracie Dykstra, owner

She thought it’d be a fitting name for a coffee shop someday.

While praying about the Butler’s opportunity, Dykstra stumbled across the John 11 verse.

“If that’s not confirmation, I don’t know what is,” Dykstra said.

She took up New Grounds with faith.

“My vision was to combine ministry with a coffee shop,” Dykstra said. “I wanted it to be a

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RJ's Indoor Golf and Bar coming to Sioux Center



INDOOR GOLF + BAR

Gabe Graber – Staff Writer

Sioux Center is adding indoor golf to its roster of recreational activities, starting this summer.

Corlin Feikema and Sharon Ammons-Feikema decided to start an indoor mini golf and restaurant business: RJ's Indoor Golf and Bar. The grand opening is scheduled for late summer of 2024 and it will be located in Sioux Center's South Ridge Estates Commercial Park south of the Terrace View Event Center.

Sharon's daughter Elaina Cannegieter (Ammons), is a senior at Dordt studying journalism. She has been helping her family by getting the word out about the upcoming business, assisting with overall design and marketing, both online and offline.

"I'm in charge of the design aspect, like what everything will look like on the inside," Cannegieter said. "I also have to buy decorations and make sculptures for the golf course."

The name "RJ" in the title was no accident. "We called it RJ's to be named after my stepdad's wife Rachel, who passed away, and after my dad John who passed away as well," Ammons explained.

The final vision for the business is a two-

story building with golf courses and restaurant downstairs and an event center upstairs for people to rent out for parties.

"With golf, there will be two 18-hole courses," Cannegieter said. "One of them is going to be professional, with more obstacles and longer holes. The other one will be easier for beginners. In the back, there will be four golf simulators, where you can play golf among other games. All of this will be in the outside area and the bar and restaurant will be in the middle."

"One of them is going to be professional, with more obstacles and longer holes. The other one will be easier for beginners."
- Elaina Cannegieter

One of the biggest challenges will be finances: the construction will cost around \$3 million via a loan from American State Bank. Cannegieter said that she will work for RJ's until it is on its feet, though it likely won't be her career forever. For now, she will continue to work on marketing and event planning as she works towards completing her degree.

"Some of the biggest challenges I've faced with the design are just knowing what will make people want to come back," Cannegieter said. "On top of that, just finding the things I want is hard, like, for example, giant dinosaur statues are pretty rare to buy. But overall, my mom is just struggling with the lack of experience, as she's never run a business before."

Photo credit: Gabe Graber

Dordt Ag students take part in state-level contest

Megan Kroon — Staff Writer

The Professional Agricultural Student Organization, PAS, hosts an annual contest that takes place at state and national levels, a contest that Dordt University students are eager to compete in.

Kelsey Hubach, a senior agriculture major, is one of the students who has attended this event in the past.

"[PAS is] a national based organization where, through the conferences and competitions that they host every year, it gives college students and those enrolled the opportunity to engage in competitions that test your skills in agriculture," Hubach said.

But PAS isn't just about competing.

"You can also make connections by attending because, more often than not, there are career fairs that they have at both state and national levels. You can network with a lot of different people, especially industry professionals and make connections through PAS," Hubach said.

Some of the people that students can connect with are the people they might work with in the future. In addition to competing and building connections, PAS contests have value for Dordt as a teaching baseline.

"It also gives [Dordt] a baseline with how we're doing with our curriculum versus a lot of other places across the country," said Gary De Vries, Agriculture Department Instructor. "Are our students competitive with what they know compared to students at Iowa State or [other schools]? Are our students learning and know enough stuff to be competitive in that market?"

Dordt teams and individuals often do well at the competition. Last year, every team advanced to the national level. The top six teams in the state attend nationals, as well as the top two individuals in their competition areas. Nationals include schools from across the country, from New York to Washington state, although most schools are primarily located in the Midwest. Hubach described it as "a national-based

organization," which is what makes the national level so competitive.

At the state level, any school with a post-secondary agriculture program sends students. Schools vary from four-year programs like Dordt, larger schools like Iowa State to community colleges.

This year, Dordt sent 23 students to the state competition, divided into 8 teams. Team events ranged from farm business management or soil science to dairy or agronomy. Every student competing in a team event also competed individually. Individual topics ranged from employment interview and impromptu speaking to vet technology and ag education.

"One of the beauties of PAS is that it has a wide range of potential areas," De Vries said. Even better, these areas fit into the agriculture majors at Dordt perfectly.

Competing allows students to apply real world skills. Students practice time management, networking, and leadership at the event. When competing, teams must decide "how [they] are going to effectively present this research to the judges with the information that [they] have," Hubach said.

"There are so many different colleges there and you are competing with schools from around the area and I think it kind of pushes you to step outside of your comfort zone a little bit and to branch out and meet new people," Hubach said.

De Vries sees the value in contests that teach you real-world skills.

"I love the interview event because that is practicing interview skills with HR professionals from across the state." Students can get valuable feedback on their strengths and weaknesses, as well as getting experience without having a lot at stake.

This year, the state competition took place Feb. 6-8 in Moravia, Iowa. The National competition is March 11-14 in Springfield, Illinois.

The DU Pickles swing into action



Myra Carlson—Staff Writer

Dordt University pickleball club, or "DU Pickles" for short, swung into action this year. Lance Vermeer, Nicodemus Elliot, and Reghan Brown developed the idea for the club together through their mutual love of the sport and its ability to bring people together. Student government approved and funded the club at the beginning of this year.

Once the club was approved, the team jumped into action, with the club president, Vermeer planning times for the club to meet, and preparing the courts.

The club meets every Saturday night in the Rec Center at 8 p.m. When students arrive, they are split up into teams depending on level of experience. Courts range from those who have a lot of experience to people trying out the sport for the first time. Anyone interested in pickleball is invited to attend regardless of skill level and club membership.

The founders said the club has been an hit on campus so far.

"Within the first two weeks we had 40 people signed up," said Elliott, social media manager for the club. "It is a really easy community builder."

Several Dordt faculty members, including Erik Hoekstra and Barb Hoekstra, have made it to the Rec to play.

"I have been playing for five years now," said Brown, club vice president. "Getting more people that would never try it, to try it, is exciting. I really like the generation-unifying aspect of the sport," Brown said.

"My favorite part of the club is the community and the competitive aspect," Elliott said. The club has offered another opportunity to be active on campus and has given students the opportunity to get out of their rooms."

Photo credit: DU Pickles Instagram

Snow days at Dordt

Nyah Gesink—Staff Writer

On cold winter mornings, kids watch the television screen with wide eyes, tracking every school that goes by. Finally, their school scrolls across the screen. The moment is exciting and cheerful for many young students: there's a snow day.

Unfortunately, Dordt University students will not get that feeling anytime soon.

Robert Taylor, vice president for student success and dean of students, only remembers once in the last 10 years when Dordt has called a snow day. He recalls canceling classes for the day, only to hear that students were running across campus in nothing but shorts.

Because of this incident, Taylor said, "We probably wouldn't call a snow day again."

Instead, Dordt has other procedures in place to protect its students and staff during inclement weather. An example of these cold weather procedures happened one month ago, on Thursday, Jan. 11, at the beginning of the semester.

With the winter weather advisory, a warning from the sheriff's office not to travel, and extremely low temperatures, Dordt wanted to make sure that it kept its community safe. They sent an email to the student body. Taylor let the students know that if they were unable to come to class the next day, it would not be counted against them. This was a big relief to many students, including junior elementary education major Avery Koopmans.

"As a commuter, I don't give myself an excuse not to go to class, but on Friday I could literally not get out of my driveway," says Koopmans.

The residents who are on campus, though, have to brave the cold conditions.

Freshman social work major Johanna De Young recalls waking up that morning, looking outside, and dreading the walk to class.

"I knew from the start that it wasn't going to



be a good day," De Young said.

Some students on campus are often skeptical of holding class on the coldest days—including the blizzard in January.

While Dordt does not have a specific policy on snow days, if the weather is inclement, they do their best to adjust. They allow professors to make their own decisions about what to do for their class that day, they let commuters know that an absence will not be held against them, and they stay on top of any changes so that they can keep the community informed.

Most professors and students do their best to have class even when they could choose not to. English professor Howard Schaap drives 67 minutes to get to work each day. In the past, he has not let winter weather stop him from getting to Dordt.

"I've committed to being here," Schaap said.

Schaap's words echo the attitudes of most of Dordt's faculty and staff.

"Our mandate is to educate," Taylor said.

While Dordt is flexible and will always prioritize student safety, it is unlikely that they will call a snow day anytime soon.

Photo credit: Dordt Archives

Sports meets culture in Scotland course

Maddie Kobes – Staff Writer

This semester, Dordt University health and human performance professor Kyle Van Wyk is teaching a brand-new cross-cultural course, which studies the role of sport in culture and society. The course, Core 288: Sport & Exercise in Society, culminates with a two-week trip to Scotland in May. The trip will allow students to experience Scotland’s sports culture, societal customs, and national history.

“Sport has a reach that stretches far in every direction around the globe, and it speaks a common language and surpasses barriers that other things cannot.”
- Kyle Van Wyk

Many students involved in sports or other co-curriculars do not have the option to study abroad for a full semester. Core 288 provides



St. Andrews golf course

another option to go off-campus.

Creating the class took about two and a half years. Van Wyk worked with an organization called World Strides to and modeled Core 288 after similar cross-cultural courses at Dordt. He hoped to give students more opportunities to go abroad and recognized that many students already genuinely enjoy sports.

“I’ve broadened my horizons by trying to understand sport from a global context and what it looks like in different parts of the world,” Van Wyk said. “Sport has a reach that stretches far in

every direction around the globe, and it speaks a common language and surpasses barriers that other things cannot.”

In Scotland specifically, sports have a rich history and central role in culture. Notable Scottish contributions to global sports include golf, curling, and highland games. Soccer and club soccer are also very popular, and rivalries between fans reveal aspects of religion, politics, and national identity.

“In the course we also look at how to understand cultural differences,” Van Wyk

said. “Engage sport from a reformed Christian perspective, view global perspectives on sport and Christianity, compare sport cultures, identify issues that surround sport, and learn from influential moments in history where sport has felt like more than ‘just a game.’”

The trip will also highlight cultural and historical aspects, such as attending worship in a cathedral, volunteering at churches, sightseeing castles and historic spots, and exploring modern cities. Although the course is cross listed as HHP 350 and fits in well with the HHP program, Core 288 is not only geared towards HHP students. Students taking the class are from a wide variety of disciplines, including history, business, and agriculture.

History major Nathan Van Langingham is one of the students in the class. In addition to learning about sports, he is looking forward to engaging in history and culture while in Scotland and learning about medieval culture and religion.

“I’ve been really excited about researching other sports we don’t know a lot about as Americans,” Van Langingham said.

Core 288 aims to provide students with opportunities to study abroad and learn about a topic that is culturally important in America and around the world. The course will be offered every two years, during spring even semesters.

Photo credit: standrews.com

Dordt launches Master of Business program cont.

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think of an executive at a corporation pursuing an MBA to elevate their leadership skills. However, leaders and business owners in other fields also benefit from an MBA,” Bakker said. “For example, an engineer in a leadership position at their firm, a dentist running the business side of their practice, or a small business owner wanting to learn more about marketing are all examples of how an MBA can help someone grow.”

Jesse Veenstra, assistant professor of business administration, gave another example of how an MBA can provide personal and career development.

“Many professionals develop in their specific career field, and then find themselves managing a team or starting their own business. For example, an individual could have started their career as an electrician. Over time they gained experience and decided to start their business as an electrical contractor. A Dordt MBA would give that individual valuable knowledge and experience developing their Christian leadership and business knowledge,” Veenstra said.

The online nature of the program allows flexibility for those pursuing their master’s and will hopefully cater to many different types of students. Bakker said that Master’s degrees at Dordt “allow students to choose topics that fit their current job. This allows the students to take their learning in a direction that benefits them and adapts the program to their development needs.”

Current Dordt business professors will be teaching courses in the MBA program. Joshua Hollinger, assistant professor of economics, will teach the managerial economics course.

“This is a big opportunity for Dordt to equip business leaders with the knowledge, practical skills, and perspective it takes to advance God’s kingdom in the business sphere,” Hollinger said. “Living in the story of Christ’s redemption should change how and why we do our work, and the business world desperately needs leaders who approach all of their work with the underlying mission of advancing God’s Kingdom.”

The MBA will take a faith-based approach to business and all classes will be taught from a reformed perspective. Veenstra said the

business department saw a need for strong faith-based business MBA, integrating the reformed worldview into the field of business.

Like all other Dordt programs, all courses will be developed around the four coordinates of the Educational Framework of Dordt University – Religious Orientation, Creational Structure, Creational Development, and Contemporary Response. By basing all course materials off the four coordinates, it ensures that degree aligns with Dordt’s mission statement.

“The Dordt mission statement ‘working toward a Christ-centered renewal in all areas of life’ extends very much to the business world. The program will be 100% rooted in the core values and mission of Dordt.”
- Jesse Veenstra

“The Dordt mission statement ‘working toward a Christ-centered renewal in all areas of life’ extends very much to the business world. The program will be 100% rooted in the core values and mission of Dordt. This is not going to be just another MBA, rather a program completely centered around our beliefs,” Veenstra said.

Photo credit: Dordt University

Putting love into action across the country

Vincent Keane—Staff Writer

Over Dordt University’s spring break, groups of students will travel across the country, helping and serving in different areas. These trips called PLIA (Putting Love Into Action) are an opportunity for Dordt students to engage with short-term missions.

This program and trip have been a big part of Dordt’s mission-equipping goal for many decades. This year students will be going to locations such as Austin, Texas; Colorado Springs, Colorado; Atlanta, Georgia; St Louis, Missouri, and many more sites. Each trip will have its own emphasis or goal, such as manual labor, building relationships, helping children, or construction. Each site works with local ministries looking to help the community around them.

Dordt students Colton Burney and Grace Winnes are leading a trip to Colorado Springs. This group is working with Summit Ministries and Evangelical Christian Academy.

“[Our team will be] doing maintenance and serving in different projects which is a great opportunity,” Winnes said.

“We will go through a devotional packet every night as a group and it’s a fun way to recap the day. Also, we will be able to share meals together which have been some of my favorite times on PLIA,” Burney said.

Many consider PLIA to be a formative experience.

“It fills your cup by serving for a week. It really is an amazing experience,” said Thomas McCullough, co-leader of the group to Houston.

Dordt Campus pastor Sam Ashmore oversees the PLIA program. Each year Ashmore hears student testimonies about the effect of the service trip.

“PLIA is reflective of the Christian life of sacrifice, choosing to serve and going but then recognizing you are the one transformed from it,” Ashmore said. “If anyone is stuck in their faith and not sure what to do next, sometimes getting outside yourself and serving others takes the stress off ourselves and can get rid of some anxiety we may have.”

PLIA is not only a trip where people serve, but it is filled with fun and excitement as well. Each group gets a day off where they will go out and explore the city where they are serving. In the past teams have gone hiking, explored



downtown, or relaxed at a beach.

“[Our] off day will include either hiking or going to the Garden of the Gods. I highly recommend coming on this trip if you want to have fun,” Burney said.

Another benefit of PLIA is building community between the students on the trip. Nothing brings a group together like serving together.

“You get to go across the nation with ten of your friends having a blast and building deep relationships with people who might not be in your circle. Some of my best memories as a student on PLIA were staying up too late and having fun after serving all day,” Ashmore said.

PLIA is an opportunity to see how God is at work across the country, and experience different cultures. One team, going to Mendenhall, Mississippi, will learn about the deep-rooted racial issues that occur in the city.

“You get to see how God is at work across the nation. It is easy to be discouraged looking at the media, but when you go in person to these different sites you see people who are looking to expand the kingdom, giving you hope and encouragement,” Ashmore said.

Spring break contains various options for students, but participating in a PLIA trip offers a transformative service experience.

Photo credit: Vincent Keane

An inside look at juvenile detention

Courtney Hunt—Guest Writer

As a social work student at Dordt University, I have opportunities to work with various groups of people across the state and globe. I chose to pursue an internship involving a population of youth who are unnoticed by the general population.

Over the past few weeks, I traveled to a few locations that serve juveniles in detention centers and teen centers around Sioux County. I had no idea what to expect, except from what I had seen in movies or heard from other people.

On my first day, my partner walked me through all the regulations of what I could and could not discuss with the kids. Any information they shared with me about their case could influence their sentencing, for better or for worse.

After this initial talk, I was led through the doors of the detention center, where I was met by another steel door with a locked handle. A buzzer went off, followed by the heavy clicking of the lock as my partner pulled open a final door leading into the inner jail. Here, we were greeted by a group of teens dressed in orange, milling around the room, seemingly unbothered that an unknown individual had entered their presence. I sat down at one of the tables that lined one side of the facility and started playing a game with one of the teens. At another table, I began creating art, while getting to know my new friend, sitting across from me.

Once these formal introductions started winding down, we moved into a section of the room with large plastic chairs. I glanced to my left and to my right when my partner asked the group, “Would you all like to hear a lesson on honesty or read the [discussion] cards?”

The students chose to read off the discussion cards. Yielding to their wishes, my partner offered up the cards to be passed around the circle, asked aloud, and answered by all. Some

of the questions were more light-hearted while others dug deep into the motives behind actions or thoughts. The students were very transparent in their answers, admitting to doubts or wrongs of which they are guilty. As I sat in the circle, I became more and more comfortable with the unfamiliar surroundings. The echo of the room faded into a gentle hum, while the clinging of doors and alarms began to sound like an instrumental music video in which these kids are the main characters while the guards are side characters.

When it was my turn to answer a question, I was not met with judgment but with sympathetic nods of agreement.

I started to see these kids not as people who made a few bad choices and got caught, but as kids who are figuring out their place in the world. These kids have hopes, aspirations, and dreams of their own that have nothing to do with their sentencing. These kids long for belonging and security. For some of them, the pain of broken families runs deep within their veins. Some may feel as if they do not belong to any one place.

They have somehow managed to create their own families through bonds of friendship with others like them who are searching for meaning in life. Siblinghood is more than just blood - it is a lifestyle these kids have been able to tap into and find human connection to satisfy their deepest needs of belonging and security. As I sat with them, I was reminded of how Christ has offered each of us a place at His table, in His house. These kids are just like you and I - searching for meaning and belonging with a deep desire to connect with others. The only true belonging we have is in Christ and his sacrifice on the cross for us. These kids are no less worthy of love and respect than anyone just because they have a few more marks on their record.

Deep fake photos of Taylor Swift are a warning of what's to come

Mallory Nilles—Staff Writer

The hashtag #ProtectTaylorSwift went viral on Thursday, Jan. 25, after explicit artificial intelligence (AI) generated photos of Swift were created and distributed via the social media platform X (formerly Twitter). Searches for Swift were blocked on X two days later, after the photos had millions of shares and even more views.

The creating and distributing fake sexual images of individuals, like the recent ones of Swift is called image-based sexual abuse (IBSA). While it's easy to spot fake images of a big-name celebrity, this doesn't hold true for many girls and women who have experienced this abuse. According to independent researcher Genevieve Oh, IBSA increased ten-fold last year—and it's unlikely to stop or slow down anytime soon. Since 2017, views on deepfake porn sites total nearly 4.2 billion. It's worth noting that despite the overall rise of AI generated porn, the images disproportionately affects women.

Anyone can create a deepfake. All it takes is AI software and the face of a person to victimize. From there, AI uses deep learning algorithms to strip the clothes off the person and replace them with nude body parts. In Swift's case, the images started as a 4chan challenge to trick AI into developing sexually explicit images. From there, the images circulated on Telegram, then took to X, where the photos began to really circulate.

There are currently no laws surrounding the creation and distribution of deepfake porn in the United States. Australia, South Africa, and Britain give offenders a maximum of two years in prison. In South Korea, where many K-pop stars have experienced IBSA, the maximum sentence for producing deepfake porn for profit is seven years. Canada and Colombia are also



considering legislation. In America, people like White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre are pushing Congress take action.

Due to the lack of jurisdiction surrounding AI-generated porn, it's unclear—and maybe even unlikely—that Swift will pursue legal action. However, if congress fails to take action to protect other women against IBSA, the message being sent to them, and girls everywhere is clear: Their bodies are not theirs. Their safety and wellbeing does not matter. Until a law begins protecting women against IBSA, the problem—and consequences—will only deepen.

Contributed photo

The woes of a messy weight room



Logan Steinle – Staff Writer

It barely takes any weight room experience to understand how peevish it is to put away someone else's weights just so you can set up your own. One of the most fundamental pieces of gym etiquette is putting what you use back to exactly where it should be found.

Lately, the community weight room in the Rec Center has displayed a lack of this etiquette the most out of any gym I have been to in my life. Plates of different weights are scattered across the floor around the squat racks. Dumbbells are consistently out of order on the racks. Plates seem to never make it back to the tree stand from the preacher curl bench, and resistance bands are often left tied to random squat racks.

I find this disorganization unfortunate given that the gym was so recently updated and re-organized. What is more unfortunate is that this weight room is most often used by college-aged people and older, who often have years of athletic experience. Those who use the community weight room understand more than most how annoying these very preventable

issues can be. They should know how to properly put back what they used. If you can lift it for your workout, you can easily put it back.

I don't know whether this issue is caused more by a lack of etiquette or lack of clarity in the weight room of where to put different items. Many times, I find myself looking for a certain attachment or clip, only to find it in the most unorthodox spot imaginable. Sometimes I am frustrated by the obvious spot in which it should have been placed, while other times I understand how there are no clear spots available for it to be stored. Either way, the community weight room could look much better than how people have been leaving it recently. Every single person that is mature enough to use a gym responsibly can use some sense in placing everything back to an appropriate spot.

Nobody likes dealing with other people's messes. To all those who use the community weight room, I beg of you: make others' lives a little easier and clean up after yourself.

Photo credit: Logan Steinle

Live here, live there, live nowhere: the stress of rooming

Maddie Wolgen – Staff Writer

Finding roommates for next fall is a trying time for many Dordt University students, who realize they may have too many friends, not enough close friends, or no friends.

The time is approaching when the upperclassmen must round up the people they know and decide if they can all live in one place without major issues. I think I can speak for many people, especially soon-to-be juniors, when saying that rooming is stressful.

On top of starting a new semester, one must also have apartment rooming on their radar. It's a lot to ask of a college student, to have them determine their livelihood for the following semester already in February. In the midst of quarterly tests and papers, we must also maintain a social life in hopes that someone needs a roommate and that it comes up in conversation. But not just anyone.

Finding the right people to room with is the key, especially when we are given limited numbers of roommates. And very specific numbers at that. Let's say you have a group of three friends. You must find just one more person to live in East Campus, but that is nearly impossible. Instead, you need to join another group of three to be in Southview, Kuyper, the Squares, or the Townhomes, but any other solid group of three friends is not going to want to join another solid group of three friends—too

much division in one room. The same thing goes for finding a group of four. Who has a group of four that is looking for a group of three to join them? They probably already have their name down for living in East Campus.

I guess it's a blessing that we have so many options. Five buildings is quite the upgrade for many underclassmen. Then again, we only had to have one roommate, apart from West Hall, who was either picked for us or picked specifically by us. Despite how any rooming situation ended up, it was relieving to not have to choose who you're rooming with. But going potluck as an upperclassman? You could either be seen as the bravest soul on campus or slightly odd – take your chances.

Is finding roommates stressful for men on campus? I have never heard a group of guys talk about being roommates. Nor have I heard one complain about not being able to find a roommate. I'm convinced that they are simply more content than women when it comes to living with each other.

Whatever you are planning for next semester, whether it is living in the apartments or the underclassmen dorms, buying a house, renting a basement apartment, or living with your parents, remember that we are all in the same boat. Remember to keep your options open and accept new people with open arms—even if they are one of those “not close enough friends.”

Dance and cheer teams leap into competition season

Rebecca Jacobsen – Staff Writer

On the weekend of February 2 and 3, the dance and cheer teams participated in their first two competitions of the season at Midland University and Doane University in Nebraska. Many who are involved on the teams agree that the competitions were successful. Both dance and cheer are in strong positions for the rest of the season.

Dance captain and senior Aubrey Hill attributes the success of their first competitions to the team’s camaraderie and coach Mel Knobloch’s positive words before their performances. Knobloch made space to not focus as much on scoring high, and this relaxed the team.

“Competitions can be stressful because there’s a lot on the line for two minutes. Our coach said to us... ‘I don’t care how you do, I’m going to love you regardless,’” Hill said, reflecting on the competition. “We want to win and we want to do well, but we’re just going to have fun because it’s what we love to do. I think that’s why it went so well, it’s the attitudes and the atmosphere we had this year, which is a good way to start.”

Another factor that contributes to the teams’ success is the timing of competitions. In previous years, competitions would occur every weekend. This year, the dance and cheer teams have two competitions every other weekend – one on Friday and another one close by on Saturday.

Although this can be tiring, the gap between competitions enables the teams to have consistent performances at competitions. They then get two weeks, rather than one, to make any necessary changes or improvements to their routine.

Junior Natasha Sampson has been competing on both the cheer and dance team since her



freshman year. She appreciates not having to worry about making big changes to their routines between the two competitions. She also loves the competitive and unified feeling of competition days.

“It’s kind of a cool atmosphere amongst the different colleges,” Sampson said. “Also, I think it brings us together as a team because

we’re working towards this one goal of going and competing successfully. It’s a good bonding time for all of us.”

Although the competition season just started, it hasn’t been without its challenges. These include busy weeks, tough competition, injuries, and a long season length. Both cheer and dance start at the beginning of the year,

performing at football games, and extend throughout second semester.

A challenge unique to the sports of dance and cheer is the subjectivity of the scoring. Each competition’s scores are based on a group of judges’ opinions. These opinions change from judge to judge and from day to day. Even if the team feels they have had their best performance, it is possible that their score won’t reflect that because of how a particular judge perceived the performance on that day. Although this can be difficult for both teams to process, Knobloch chooses to combat it with positivity and a growth mindset.

“Out of every obstacle and challenge, there’s a positive that comes out of it,” Knobloch said. Instead of just being complacent and staying where we’re at, maybe that lower score pushes us to the next level instead and gets us more motivated. [I’m just] putting that positive spin on everything, trying to find the lesson and the learning point in it, and being able to use that and adapt it for the next week.”

The next competition for the dance and cheer teams takes place on February 9 at Crown Classic at York University, followed by the Concordia Duals at Concordia University on February 10.

Photo credit: Hannah Schneider

Why is the big game such a big deal?



Ethan Mulder – Staff Writer

As Super Bowl LVIII draws near, NFL fans across America are gearing up for the annual spectacle that has come to represent the nation’s second-favorite pastime.

It’s not just hardcore fans—most Americans, even those who never watch football on an ordinary Sunday, can probably recall having watched one or two Super Bowls in their lives. Last year’s game was viewed by approximately 200 million people according to the NFL—almost 60 percent of the United States population.

On Feb. 11, the game pits the defending Super Bowl champions, the Kansas City Chiefs, against this year’s NFC champion, the San Francisco 49ers. The showdown will take place in Las Vegas, Nevada for the first time in history.

The fact the Super Bowl is such a far-reaching event and brings together both the hardcore fans and the uninitiated alike makes it a common cultural touchpoint. Still, the experience may vary. Many viewers, Dordt University students

included, have fond memories associated with both the big game itself and the culture and traditions that have sprung up around it.

“It’s not quite a holiday, but it’s an event that usually brings people together, or at least it has been that for my whole life.”
- Tyler Wieringa

“My family usually attends or hosts Super Bowl parties,” said Tyler Wieringa, a Dordt senior and three-year Defender linebacker. “It kind of varies per year, but I always

Cont. to pg. 7

Indoor track and field has an exciting start



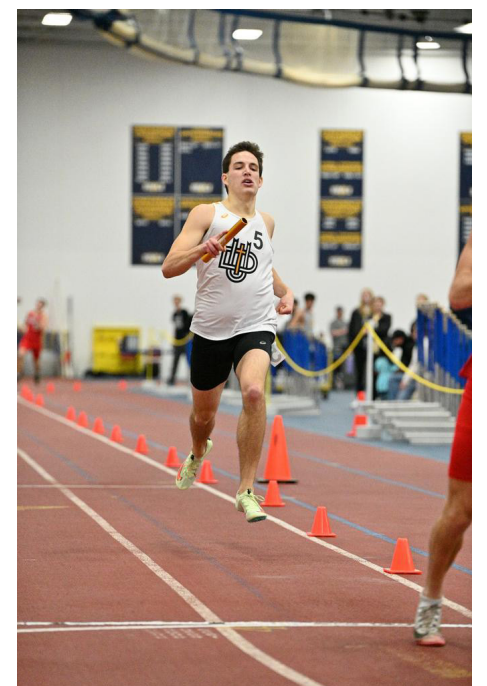
Joshua Louis – Staff Writer

Dordt University’s track and field indoor season is off to a fast-paced start.

The mens team ranked in the top five in the NAIA coaches’ poll.

Many athletes on the team have met both the automatic and provisional standards to qualify for indoor nationals at the end of February.

Some of the national qualifiers for the men include Isaac Davelaar, Peter Shippy, and Payton Mauldin. National qualifiers on the women’s team include Shelby Buwalda and Jessica (Kampman) Walczak. Both the men’s and women’s teams have placed first in several meets this year. In the most recent meets, the DWU Open and Frank Sevigne Husker Invite, a number of Defenders from both the men and women’s team achieved personal best performances. These players include Yura



Rozendal in the pole vault, Michah Schaap in the triple jump, Thaniel Schroeder in the 1000m, Shelby Buwalda in the 600m, and Jessica (Kampman) Walczak in the 3000m. Senior runner Payton Mauldin, set a school record in the 400m with a 46.99 time.

Graduate assistant Bethany Ten Haken, works with both the men’s and women’s teams. According to Ten Haken, the freshman have done a terrific job stepping up to lead. But it has also been gratifying to watch the seniors grow in their final season.

Due to the large size of the team, it is hard to practice all together, which can make practices difficult. Assistant coach Nate Wolf said there have been a couple injuries, but none are severe enough to threaten the team’s chance for success.

Cont. to pg. 7

Oppenheimer dominates awards season

Briana Gardner—Staff Writer

The Golden Globes kicked off the awards season on Jan. 7 with relatively unsurprising results. “Barbie”, “Poor Things”, and “Oppenheimer” all performed as expected, winning multiple awards each. This paved the way for host Jo Koy to create more of a splash for his hosting flop than the outcomes themselves. The Grammy’s closely followed on Feb. 4, with Taylor Swift, Zach Bryan, and Billie Eilish among the winners.

To wrap up awards season, the 96th Academy Awards will take place on March 10, with Jimmy Kimmel hosting for his fourth time. Halle Berry, Harrison Ford, and Pedro Pascal are three of the A-list presenters who will announce the 24 Oscars winners in various categories.

Contrary to the Golden Globes, the Academy Awards exclusively honors film. They award more specific honors for movie attributes, including makeup, production design, and sound editing. Around 300 journalists vote for the Golden Globes, but the Oscars are determined by about 9,500 (and growing) eligible Academy members. The members also vote for their respective categories, with actors voting for the Best Actor and Actress, directors voting for Fellow Directors, and so on. Other categories have extenuating circumstances and exceptions, and all academy members vote for their favorite film of the year.

With 24 awards on the line, it is tough to forecast winners in each category and provide



persuasive arguments. Here are the most anticipated awards this season, along with their predicted results.

“Oppenheimer” is projected to win Best Film. The Golden Globes has previously been good predictors of Oscar awards, and “Oppenheimer” stole the spotlight, winning five out of its eight nominations. It has been nominated for 13 Oscars and is the strongest contender for Best Picture.

Christopher Nolan, who directed “Oppenheimer”, will likely receive the coveted

award for Best Director. After impressive films such as “The Dark Knight,” “Inception,” and “Dunkirk,” Nolan has built up quite a repertoire that makes him hard to beat. His strongest contender is Martin Scorsese, who directed “Killers of the Flower Moon”.

Murphy, who played the leading role, will likely win Best Actor for his performance in “Oppenheimer.” Murphy and Nolan have worked together on some of Nolan’s higher-profile projects, making them a difficult duo to challenge.

“Killers of the Flower Moon” was also a highly praised movie in 2023. Lily Gladstone, who played the leading actress, is the favored winner for her role. Gladstone has been working in the film industry for over a decade, but is receiving her widest recognition now from fans and film critics.

While Best Actress offers respite from “Oppenheimer’s” overarching presence, Best Supporting Actor will likely be awarded to another “Oppenheimer” star, Robert Downey Jr. Downey Jr. has never won an Oscar, although he was nominated for his performances in “Scent of a Woman” in 1993 and “Tropic Thunder” in 2009. With his win this January, Downey boasts four Golden Globes.

Oppenheimer also has an opportunity to clinch Best Supporting Actress with Emily Blunt, who played alongside Murphy as Oppenheimer’s wife. Blunt may be in for some competition, however, as Da’Vine Joy Randolph won Best Supporting Actress at the Golden Globes a little over a month ago.

“Oppenheimer” appears to be towering over its competition this awards season, claiming some of the most prestigious awards for actors, directors, and filmmakers alike. With the Oscars quickly approaching, it will be intriguing to see whether “Oppenheimer’s” reputation in the film industry is maintained, or if it will be challenged in any of these categories.

Contributed photo

Put down the phone, pick up a book

Aidan Kraft – Staff Writer

Our modern age and its relationship with entertainment has decimated our ability to pay attention to any form of leisure longer than sixty seconds. This lack of focus bleeds into every aspect of our lives. Important things such as schoolwork and vital relationships are constantly being outcompeted by a quick hit of dopamine from short entertainment. This is an enormous problem which will inhibit us and our children’s lives with utmost potency if we continue to allow such brain rot to continue.

Fortunately, this has a solution which is lush with wisdom of the past, entertaining beyond belief, and is deeply impactful while providing a sense of gratification. This solution is leafed and bound, pleasing to hold and broad in its subject matter: a piece of classic literature.

“The classic is something that looks at all the aspects of life and sort of hits on them all and many blend them together in interesting ways to create curious questions and to even provide a vision for some of their answers,” said Dordt University English professor Dr. Josh Matthews.

Essentially, classic literature comments on the constant human condition from a unique perspective. This perspective is keen on issues of our day without the cultural bias that others hold. To read is to interpret a vivid depiction of humanity in the context of another time and culture. It pulls back the veil of current culture and gives the reader raw humanity to be judged, tried, and improved.

When one encounters a work which, in marvelous lucidity, shines a light on humanity’s dark spaces, it gives one the ability to break free from the wall in which they are chained. They leave the cave to feel the true light of the sunshine on their face. In essence, classic literature equips the reader with the capacity to see life in a new lens, providing them with ample ability to see both the remarkable highs and immense lows of the human condition.

“Each of these books stimulate the brain in their different points of religious, intellectual, emotional, or philosophical thinking,” said junior history major Nathan VanLaningham. “I believe the bombardment a reader may experience from these ideas forces a struggle within oneself to develop a unique and personal philosophy on life.”



Which leads to my next point: the reading of classic literature is a powerful mechanism with which one can strengthen their faith.

By encountering a multitude of perspectives on humanity, it allows us to more closely understand human nature. When we then encounter scripture which comments on mankind’s beauty or sinfulness, we can draw back to the stories which we previously read in the insightful literary classics.

This is a prime example of the benefits of the faithful engagement of the many spheres of our wonderful creation. Additionally, many of the authors of literary classics offer a unique perspective of humanity, while also being a devout Christian. Authors like Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Leo Tolstoy offer both beautiful and compelling writing along with a new Christian perspective on the world.

For me, some classics have been particularly significant in strengthening my faith. Works like “The Brothers Karamazov,” “Crime and Punishment,” and the controversial “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” offer unique perspectives on the faith, that to ignore them would be a disservice to yourself.

Look, I sometimes can’t put the phone down, I stay up too late scrolling on TikTok, I waste my time on the internet like everyone else. But the introduction of classic literature into my life has not only improved my attention span, performance in school, and attention to vital relationships, it has also deepened my faith and walk with the Almighty. And it could do the same for you.

Contributed photo

Broadway and Desserts presented by Concert Choir



Jeralyn Wessel – Staff Writer

On Saturday, Feb. 10, at 7:30p.m., the Dordt University Concert Choir will hold the annual Broadway & Desserts fundraiser. The show will be hosted in the Grille area of the Campus Center, and tickets for students cost \$5.

“Broadway & Desserts is right around Valentine’s Day so it would make a killer date night – you don’t even have to travel far,” said Miranda Munson, a concert choir member, and head of the Broadway and Desserts planning committee.

The show will be bookended with two songs from “Annie Get Your Gun” and “Rent.” These will be performed by the full Concert Choir, while the rest of the acts will be performed by members in either small groups or individually. Throughout the show, the audience will be served three courses of desserts provided by Dordt Dining Services.

“It’s entertaining to hear each other sing solos and duets,” said Rachel Roggenburg, a junior choir member. “Broadway music is fun to sing and is a nice break from some of our more difficult pieces we do.”

In the past, the fundraiser has sold out, with a cap of 300 people. The unique variety of acts and musical talent and dining experience creates a more intimate atmosphere than regular choir concerts.

“It’s a concert more for the people [who are] less into traditional music,” said Emily Zuidema, a choir member and one of the M.C.’s for Broadway & Desserts.

Preparation for the event requires not only organizing the acts but also deciding on lighting, stage placement, and many other directing decisions. Munson, has overseen a team of five or six people throughout the preparation for Broadway & Desserts. She held the role two years ago and, after a semester abroad last year, has decided to lead the planning process once again.

“It’s just cool to come back to it and try to make it better than when I did it two years ago,” Munson said.

The money raised from this event will fund the per diems for the choir members during their Pacific Northwest tour and cover other direct expenses of the trip.

“Sometimes it gets lost on students why we are fundraising,” Munson said. “This isn’t just for the Music Department. It directly benefits students—your friends in Concert Choir.”

Over spring break, the Concert Choir will perform at various locations in Montana, Idaho, Washington, and Canada.

Photo Credit: Dordt University

Jazz band changes hands

Eleanor Ryder – Staff Writer

On a typical Wednesday night in the B.J. Haan Auditorium, a special kind of music can be heard from the band room. This is where the jazz band rehearses their set; classic and contemporary pieces, played by a select group of around 20 instrumentalists.

This semester came with changes for the 4th Avenue Band. Not only did they lose some student players, but they also lost their director of over ten years.

Dordt's jazz band director and trumpet professor, Kevin Linder, resigned from his positions before the start of the 2024 Spring semester. At the end of last semester, Linder experienced vision problems that continued to get worsen into the new year.

Senior saxophone player Brody Joens recounted Linder powering through the spots in his vision to continue teaching.

"Rehearsal would be going, and he has his music right here," Joens said, holding his hands a few inches away from his nose. "He had two pairs of glasses that he would switch on and off."

Linder also spent several weeks in the hospital last November with heart problems.

"He had a ninety percent blockage in one of his arteries. He was out for two weeks, and probably should have been out for longer, but he was not gonna miss the concert. So he came to the concert and sat down and directed us," Joens said.

Linder called professor of music, Ryan Smit a few days before the spring semester began, and explained that he felt unable to move forward as the jazz band director at Dordt.

"Leading into the Christmas break, [Linder's



vision] began to get worse," said director of instrumental activities Dr. Onsby Rose. "It advanced enough that he felt he needed to step away from teaching."

Rose explored several names in the area that might be interested in the open position. After exhausting the possible options, Rose decided to take on the position of director himself.

The change left Rose with an overload of teaching on top of the other ensembles he conducts.

"But that's all part of being a small college orchestra director. You do what's needed," Rose said. "[And] It gives me another outlet to be able to work with [my students]."

Rose has a history of directing and playing in jazz bands. The title of director is given to those who lead jazz ensembles, as opposed to more classically oriented ensembles like orchestra or wind symphony, which are led by conductors. Some jazz directors will play in the band too,

which Linder would do on occasion, playing the trumpet.

Though Linder has stepped away from teaching, he has made a lasting impact on his students. Linder has years of experience playing and teaching jazz, and the 4th Avenue Band has been high quality under his direction.

"He knows jazz," Joens said. "With Kevin, we always stop after like ten measures," Joens smiled as he reflected on Linder's high standards. "If it's not perfect he's going to go back and do it again until it's perfect. Or at least less bad."

Maren Hettinga, a sophomore trumpet player in the jazz band, recalls rehearsals with Linder. "He was always a hoot to work with," Hettinga said. "He loved everybody—would always give you a hug."

"He's so nice," Joens said. "Always concerned about all the students and how they're doing."

Linder often shared his testimony and



Kevin Linder

encouraged his students in their spiritual lives.

"He was a great Christian influence," Hettinga said. "He encouraged us to live in our faith and find our faith in jazz."

Linder inspired his students with his love of jazz.

"I've always loved jazz," Hettinga said, "but I feel like Kevin made me like it even more. I definitely have listened to it a lot more after getting to know Kevin. He opened my window to new styles and varieties—being open to listen to things that might sound weird at first but the more you listen the cooler it gets."

The 4th Avenue Band performs next on Feb. 26 at 8 p.m. under the direction of Dr. Rose.

Photo credit: Dordt University

Excitement about this year's indoor track and field season cont.

Cont. from pg. 5



Many top athletes from the women's team graduated last year, so TenHaken is working with a younger women's team.

Ayda Den Herder, a sophomore placed first in the long jump at the DWU Open last week.

This year has been different for Den Herder, due to losing teammates from last year, but she looks forward to the possibilities awaiting the team in the future, and the chance to build relationships with freshmen.

"I'm excited to see what will come later in the season," Den Herder said.

Both teams look forward to upcoming meets later this month— including the Mount Marty invite in Yankton, SD on Feb. 9— and the opportunity to qualify for the NAIA championship.

"We kind of have a team philosophy that we can't control what the other teams do. We can just control what we can do," Ten Haken said. "So, it's just fun to go out and see what our athletes can do at those meets."

Photo credits: Hannah Schneider, Dordt Athletics

Why is the big game such a big deal? cont.

Cont. from pg. 5



Jordan Peele in 2019 Twilight Zone Superbowl commercial

used to go to a Super Bowl party with my family and friends when I was younger. This year I plan to go with friends and watch the Super Bowl as well."

Wieringa highlighted the social aspect of the big game, saying, "it's not quite a holiday, but it's an event that usually brings people together, or at least it has been that for my whole life."

People less interested in the game itself can be drawn in by other elements, such as the halftime show or advertisements, which have almost eclipsed the actual game in cultural importance. These ads seem to have a special appeal that most television commercials don't.

"I remember vividly one of the ads [in a previous Super Bowl] was for the 2019 reboot of the Twilight Zone with Jordan Peele," said senior digital media major Philip Shippy. "The commercial where it looks like the game is about to start again, and then it does a glitch effect, and no one is in the stands. That trailer is still one of the coolest trailers in my mind. That couldn't really be done anytime else."

Other students, like Tyra Hulstein disagree about the quality of commercials. "As kids, [watching the commercials] was our favorite

part. I feel like the commercials have gotten worse the last few years. They aren't that funny anymore, but maybe that's just me." Hulstein said.

Regardless of the ads' quality, it's obvious that their reputation composes a significant part of the Super Bowl's overall appeal, which the very existence of the repeated phrase, "I only watch it for the ads," demonstrates.

It's clear that there's more to the Super Bowl than just the climactic showdown between two rival teams. The social elements, such as the parties or the buzz of online speculation, and the elements that separate it from an ordinary football game, such as the ads and the halftime show, come together every February to create the spectacle that Americans of any and all walks of life can't help but be captivated by.

Contributed photos

New Grounds brings new beginnings cont.

Cont. from pg. 1

faith-filled atmosphere for people to meet and talk but also to work and rest."

Dykstra kept the menu simple to focus on offering high-quality options. New Grounds sells lattes and americanos, lotus teas, smoothies, and brewed coffee. Baked goods are also available, as well as sandwiches and salads during lunchtime.

The shop had a busy opening week. Dordt students were some of the first customers to try it out.

"It's a good spot for studying during the day," Riley Guttridge said. "It's nice and bright."

"Vibes are a 10/10," sophomore Gena Koetsier said. "The coffee is fantastic. And

because she's a Dordt-grad, it's exciting to see this. I really hope she does well."

New Grounds opens at 7 a.m. Monday-Saturday and closes at different times, depending on the weekday. The Sweet and Salty Latte is already a favorite of the New Grounds crowd, as well as the Frosted Snickerdoodle Latte.

Dykstra is excited about the new beginning and is hopeful for the future.

"I hope that we can keep providing for years, serving the community and adapting, while keeping our core values— and having that quality coffee that people around here crave," Dykstra said.

Photo credit: Mylia Wagenaar

The Back Page

Diamond Digs



Hulst Library adds new strategies to enforce the 2-hour checkout limit.

Stories from Abroad:

Mountain adventures in New Zealand



Megan Vander Kooi — Staff Writer

The first couple of days spent at my new “home” were filled with change and acclimation: meeting all the other students, meeting my new roommate, learning what is acceptable or not in the culture, and getting accustomed to the New Zealand sun. After spending two days at our campus (Sky Hi Lodge), a couple of the other students had a genius idea of going on an overnight hike for our first weekend. While I was still jet-lagged and sleep-deprived, I, of course, said yes to the adventure. We spent the rest of Saturday morning filling our packs with hiking gear, water, and food in preparation for the journey ahead. However, nothing could have truly prepared me mentally for what we would have to endure to make it to the top.

Mt. Fyffe has a total elevation of 1,602m - so, roughly a mile. When you read it, it sounds easy. Being a born-and-raised Iowa girl who has hardly ever experienced elevation change, this was no easy task. To the “saddle” where we would stop to camp overnight was about 4 miles. The entire 4 miles, however, was straight up-hill. Not a steady uphill incline, but rather a steep uphill that seemed to never come to an end. Hardly ever was there a decline or relatively flat section of the trail. My calves and lungs were burning and aching to rest while the sun beat heavily against our

15 lb packs weighing down our backs. Never have I ever done something harder than this hike. This very well could be the hardest thing - physically - that I have ever done.

Hiking up to the “saddle” took about three and a half hours. Once we reached our camping spot, we set up the tents and started to make supper. What was on the menu, you might ask? Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. The six of us split an entire loaf of bread, box of crackers, and a spinach tortilla. We spent the rest of the evening reading Psalms while watching the sun go down, cascading an array of soft pastels against the clouds surrounding the mountain. I could just see tip of the peninsula jutting out from the land, into the crystal blue of the ocean around it. The sea of blue stretched on as far as the eye could see, eventually merging with the sky of blue above it.

I was absolutely exhausted and decided to go to bed early. However, the howling wind throughout the night made it hard to get the rest needed before waking up bright and early - at 4:30am - the next morning. When the time had come, we packed up our tents and set out for the summit before the sun peeked over the horizon. The summit was about one mile from our tenting spot and, you guessed it, was entirely uphill. One and a half hours later, we made it up the treacherous hike just as the sunrise was waning.

Just as we were nearing the top, we heard a

screeching noise coming from ahead on the trail. The beautiful parrot of New Zealand - the Kea - was curiously watching us as we walked up the trail towards it. As we continued walking, we saw a small group of them flying along the edge of the mountain. Their fiery red underwings and tails were a statement against the mountainous colors around it. It was beautiful. According to a lady from the Department of Conservation (who we met a couple days after this incident), it has been seven years since a group of four or more Keas have been spotted. We had the wonderful privilege of spotting the most recent large group of Keas. How wonderful is that?

“There are really no words to fully capture the beauty we witnessed on top of that mountain. That beauty and splendor was worth the climb.”
- Megan Vander Kooi

With that experience serving as our new-found motivation, we reached the top of the summit in

time for sunrise. And, let me tell you, the best view certainly does come after the hardest climb. Colors splashed across the sky and lit up the hills beneath us. Wow. Our God is truly magnificent. There are really no words to fully capture the beauty we witnessed on top of that mountain. That beauty and splendor was worth the climb.

We could have stayed up on that mountain for ages, admiring the beauty the unfolded around. However, we needed to make the trip down the mountain. In order to make it to church on time, we would have to trek down in two and a half hours - half the time it took to get up the mountain. Leaving the summit at 6:30 a.m., we managed to make it down by 9 a.m. without tripping on the loose gravel that made up the path. We got to Sky Hi, took the fastest showers of our lives, and then walked to church. Who knew you could do all that in less than 24 hours?

There’s talk about doing this hike again in two weeks. I think I’m going to have to let my aching legs sit that next time out until I’m more in shape.

Photo credit: Megan Vander Kooi

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