

Academic Insert

CONTACT

newsletter of the

International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education

ISSN: 1521-9631

Vol. 15, No. 3, continued.

May 2004

**The Soul of the Curriculum:
A Framework for Integral Christian Education^[1]**
by
Hubert R. Krygsman, Dordt College

I. Introduction

1. Three trends in contemporary university curricular reform

At a recent conference that I attended—an AAC&U-sponsored conference on “General Education and Assessment”—an array of presenters from both large state universities and small private colleges waxed eloquent about the perils and potential of General Education curricular reform.^[1] I came away from the conference struck by the impression of three main trends. **First**, some 57% of four-year colleges and universities across the USA are in the process of revising their core curricula, largely under the pressure of accrediting agencies demanding demonstrable assessment results.^[2] We in North America, then, are at the peak of a “third wave” of General Education reform that began in the late 1980’s, or alternatively the “first wave” of the 21st century. Each succeeding wave, the 1920’s, the 1950’s, and the 1990’s (now extending into the 2000’s), indicates profound reconsideration of the core meaning of learning, and of our relationship to the world.^[3] **Second**, conference presenters urged that General Education reform be undertaken on the basis of a commonly shared and clearly articulated vision for education and learning. **Third**, the most common model of the revised General Education curriculum was one that transformed (or abandoned, if you like) disciplinary “content” distributions in favor of student learning outcomes that could be measured, and that would be functional in students’ lives. Among the most popular outcomes espoused were “critical thinking,” “inter-disciplinarity,” “scientific reasoning,” “interpretive perspectives and practices,” “citizenship” or “values,” “commitment,” and “creativity.” Such outcomes might be realized in any variety of courses, and in many cases the entire

curriculum was “up for grabs” to anyone who could demonstrate that their proposed course would achieve the desired outcomes.

The second and third of these trends, it seems to me, are paradoxical because though the revised curricula display agreement at a general level on desirable student outcomes, they also display a post-modern sense of dis-integration, or at least a vacuum of common vision, about what these skills are to be applied to or what their good is. What “criteria” are implied in “critical thinking,” for instance? Or what inner coherence exists in complex things that is disclosed in inter-disciplinary study? Is there one, or are there many forms of “scientific reasoning”? What makes one form preferable, or what kinds of *scientia*—that is, temporary abstraction for the sake of analysis—are appropriate to different aspects of reality? And is not such scientific reasoning also an interpretive activity? If so, from what perspective should it be undertaken? What touchstone, vantage point, or foundation ought to direct our “interpretive perspectives”? And what norms or ends are to be achieved in “citizenship,” or what should students be taught to value beyond “developing their values”? Beyond all this, how do these cognitive learning activities relate to any world beyond the learner? What is the nature of that world, or for that matter of our students, and what ought students to learn about these? Of such matters no presenter spoke, I suspect because they are considered either unanswerable, divisive, or, in the post-modern worldview, taboo.

2. Thesis: Christianity, the soul of the university, and the Christian mind

I take this conference on “Christianity and the soul of the university” to be concerned not only with renewing Christian faith in our hearts and those of our students, but more specifically with exploring how Christian faith might relate to the task of the university so as to revive what Mark Noll calls “the Christian mind.”^[4] Part of this exploration, I submit, should examine the relationship of Christianity not only to particular disciplines, but also to the overall task and purpose of the university—namely that of learning—and to the ways that we structure that learning in the curriculum. As have others, Dordt College has wrestled with these questions in recent years in its own efforts to assess and revise its curriculum. To answer such questions we developed during the mid-1990’s an *Educational Framework* that tries to translate the college’s mission of Christian education into what we hope is a coherent set of curricular guidelines, including educational principles, parameters and goals, and curricular design for each of the college’s programs, throughout which we seek to be faithful to Christ’s lordship.^[5]

In this presentation I wish to use Dordt’s *Educational Framework* to illustrate and advocate two complementary points: **First**, that in the context of the university, the Christian soul comes to life insofar as it is embodied “flesh-and-bone” in the curriculum that is at the center of the work of the university. **Second**, that our Christian faith can and ought to provide a place to stand and a perspective or vision by which to direct, in an integral way, the learning that is the task of the university. Taking these two points together, I submit that Christian scholars and educators who confess the lordship of the risen Christ and seek to be his disciples ought to be able to ask, and answer, the kinds of questions that go unasked and unanswered in today’s secular university. But to do so, we should frame those

questions in ways that open us to recognizing Christ's lordship over all of life, including our learning. Thus we might ask: What do Christian college and university students need to learn in order to become mature, discerning disciples of Christ in both their specialized fields of study and in their daily walk in the common areas of life? How, amid the fragmentation of the (post-) modern university curriculum, shall we think about the world coherently, critically, and consistently in the light of God's Word? And how can our scholarship and programs in areas as diverse as biology, politics, and art grow out of roots in God's Word and equip students with knowledge and skills suitable for serving God in his world today? Such questions, I suggest, point us to the need for a comprehensive Biblical world-view and acknowledgement of Christ's lordship that are woven throughout the fabric of the curriculum. To illustrate and support these points, I will discuss the development, main components, and implementation of Dordt College's *Educational Framework*.

II. Roots and Development of Dordt College's *Educational Framework*

Dordt College, located in north-west Iowa, is a general baccalaureate institution that offers both "liberal arts" and pre-professional degrees. Dordt's stated educational mission is rooted in the Reformed Christian tradition, and especially in Abraham Kuyper's declaration that "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'"^[6] Christ is revealed in Scripture as the Incarnate Word of God through which all creation was made, as the Redeemer of creation, and as the risen and exalted Lord of creation. In the light of this confession, Dordt's mission rejects any bifurcation of faith and science; since everything exists subject to God, we pursue also our methodical scientific and educational work, as well as our everyday knowing, as part of our response to God and His world and in the context of our fundamental faith commitment and worldview.^[7] Hence our mission calls us to study all of God's creation in the light of Scripture's revelation of God's Word for creation, in order to equip us, and our students, with the knowledge, skills, and commitment to serve God in that world.^[8]

While consistently and vigorously affirming this impressive mission, Dordt has continued trying to work out its implications for scholarship and curriculum. For example, at the time of its founding in 1956, Dordt assumed what today would seem like a classic "liberal arts and sciences" model for its curriculum, arguably without critically examining how the classical Greek and liberal assumptions that were embedded in that curricular model were at cross-purposes with our vision. The "liberal arts and sciences" might produce prospective teachers and pastors who were capable of abstract reflection, well-versed in traditional ideals, and generally well-informed theoretically about the world, but how did it equip students to study and care for the environment, to practice agriculture, to seek solutions to poverty and injustice in society, etc., in ways that honored and served Christ's lordship? During the 1970's, trends toward vocational training and professionalization challenged the "liberal arts and sciences" model, and pressed Dordt to rethink its curricular model. In an effort to be more thoroughly Christ-centered and biblical, Dordt developed a new statement, *The Educational*

Task of Dordt College (1979), as an alternative to both the liberal arts and the vocational models—an alternative best captured in the phrases “serviceable insight” and “coherent encyclopedia.” By “serviceable insight,” Dordt claimed a Biblical view of gaining “wisdom” that required not merely abstract theoretical reasoning, but “insight” that understood creation in its relationship to God. This insight was not merely for the humanistic purpose of liberating the “life of the mind,” nor for the pragmatic purposes of attaining a well-paying profession, but rather was to equip students for serving God, others, and God’s world in both theoretical and practical ways. This notion of serviceable insight enabled the college to adopt programs in agriculture, engineering, social work, etc, and to view these in terms of its vision for serving Christ in all areas of life. As the revised mission put it, “[g]raduates of Dordt College must be equipped to carry out their tasks as kingdom citizens in the professions, careers, and occupations to which they have been called” (*The Educational Task*, 13).

Moreover, educating for “serviceable insight” aimed to train students in the knowledge and skills of specialized disciplines, but also to affirm the integral wholeness of both creation and our students, and to equip students for serving God in the common areas of life. The phrase “coherent encyclopedia” attempted to capture these diverse aims: while affirming the need for an “encyclopedia” of specialized disciplines that enabled study of the different aspects of creational life, it also declared that the encyclopedia of separate disciplines must not lose sight of the interconnections and coherence of things in the world, and it required that students take a General Education Program designed largely as a distributive model that mirrored the multiple dimensions of our common creaturely life, and thus also the overall curriculum.

This “encyclopedia” model, however, carried with it several limitations and unresolved problems, especially for our General Education Program. For example, it offered few avenues for connecting disciplines to enable them to explore complex relations, such as in biochemistry. Beyond this, the encyclopedic model had the potential to remain isolated in abstraction: How might it help connect students’ theoretical, classroom study to the responsible use of that learning in service to God or in students’ broader Christian faith and life? Moreover, what should be required of all students, given the array of disciplines and constraints on the number of credits in a General Education core? And how are standard introductions to individual disciplines and their related methods, which might include such activities as memorizing the skeletal structure of frogs in biology or surveying the field of psychology, significant for a business major? Furthermore, while the encyclopedia focused on disciplinary subject matter, how did it direct us to consider the best pedagogical practices suited to the developmental level of the student; that is, how do we expect “insight” to be transmitted, and how can we assess the results of that learning?

Questions such as these led us to develop an *Educational Framework* as an extension of the *Educational Task*, so as to articulate what our mission might mean specifically for a coherent curricular structure with respect to the organization, goals, and pedagogical design of our curriculum.

III. Main Components of the *Educational Framework*:

Our response to these questions was spelled out in three main components of our *Educational Framework* (see http://www.dordt.edu/publications/faculty_handbook/1-2-2.shtml#1.2.2):

1. Underlying Principles

The *Framework* begins by summarizing earlier statements of Dordt's basic principles in order to affirm the continuity between our confession of Christ's lordship and our proposed curricular structure. Among these principles are:

We begin by affirming the authority of the Bible, which reveals God's Word for creation and his redemptive work in Christ. Although the Bible does not tell us all about everything (for example, we would not subscribe to "Creation Science"), in revealing God's Word and work in Christ it provides the standpoint for our understanding of the meaning of life. We seek not only to adhere to the Bible, but also to have our world-view shaped by Biblical revelation.

That Biblical world-view emphasizes the realities of creation, fall, redemption, and the coming kingdom of God. Much hinges here on beginning with creation. By beginning here, we affirm that all that exists has its structure (including its unity and differentiated complexity), meaning, and purpose in God's Word for it. Seen through the light of the Holy Spirit and what John Calvin called "the spectacles" of Scripture,^[9] we can truly understand the world only in its relationship to God. Humans, too, are creatures fully related to the rest of creation, and they have an important role in creation: they are given the authority and ability, as God's image-bearers, to develop and care for creation in service to God, and they are made to carry out this task together, male and female, in community. To be sure, human sin (and not finally any other "structural" problem in creation) has brought hardness of heart, broken-ness in relationships, and suffering and death to the world. But in Christ's incarnation, redemptive death, and resurrection, God lovingly reclaims his world and proceeds to establish his redemptive Kingdom in all creation.

While these Biblical touchstones shape our general perspective, they also have some more specific implications for the purpose and nature of college and university education. Given those Biblical touchstones, education should equip us with deepening faith in God and wisdom about the world in relation to its God-given meaning, in order to enable us to serve and praise God in the world. This "serviceable insight" has many dimensions, including the development of deepened and specialized knowledge and skills, as well as preparation to live as mature citizens of God's kingdom in all areas of human life, such as in our responsibilities in family, church, public life, financial stewardship, etc. College or university-level education, then, should provide a coherent program of advanced and mature preparation in both specialized and general education. Also, such education should not be restricted to the theoretical work of the classroom or lab; rather, it should be fostered communally in our co-curricular activities and in student life, requiring collaboration

between all parts of the campus to make the curriculum extend organically from student life, through student learning, and into the whole of lives of students on campus, into their involvement in the Dordt community and the larger world, and into their pursuit of lives and vocations of insightful service.

2. Curricular Parameters

The second, and in my view the most innovative component of the *Framework* lies in its identification of a set of “curricular parameters” that we hope flow from our principles. Since we wanted to include such matters as Christian faith and Biblical world-view, inter-disciplinarity, vocation and service, and student life within the purview of the curriculum, we tried to move beyond defining our curriculum within the confines of discrete theoretical disciplines. Instead, our curricular parameters attempt to identify foci for the content of the curriculum and pedagogical guidelines for curriculum design.

In our content foci (otherwise known on the Dordt College campus as “the four coordinates”), the *Framework* attempts to identify four general characteristics of creaturely existence and of our learning about it. **First**, in “religious orientation,” we note that all things exist in relation to God and are called to obey his Word for them. Humans also are at heart religious creatures, and our whole lives—including our theories about the world—are shaped by what or whom we serve and thus by our response to God.^[10] To deeply understand things or people, and also to critically assess theories, therefore, requires examination of their response to God. **Second**, with the concept “creational structure” we note that all things exist as having a God-given nature, complex structure, function, and place in relation with other things, so that creation is characterized by both differentiated diversity and coherent unity. Most theoretical disciplines focus attention on specialized insight into and skills related to a particular aspect of the structured creation (e.g. physics, communication, sociology), though we need also to attend to the connections and inter-relations within and between these different aspects in order to understand creaturely things as whole beings. **Third**, though it is structured, the creation order is not static, but is also characterized by “creational development.” Mighty oak trees grow from acorns, geological plates shift, economic resources are depleted and new ones found, and human personality matures, etc. Because of their God-given place in creation, humans have an important role in leading and shaping creation’s development, though they may do so in ways that are obedient or disobedient. Disciplinary study, then, must attend to how things have developed, and especially how humans have shaped that development in their culture and history, including in the development and role of the sciences themselves. **Fourth**, under “contemporary response,” we emphasize that the study of these themes should prepare students with the commitment, insight, and skills to respond to the contemporary world and its problems in ways that bring care and shalom to the creation and thereby serve God’s coming kingdom.

We intend that this framework function across all disciplines or programs, but with varied emphases. Biology, for example, focuses on the structure of organisms, but it should do so in ways that appreciate the God-given purpose and inter-dependence of creation; it

should critically examine diverse biological theories and the perspectives that inform them; it should examine how organisms develop, and also how the science of biology and its role in society has developed; and it should equip students with both specialized skills (such as medical expertise) and a general stewardly awareness that helps us care for creation. The study of history, on the other hand, focuses on the role of humans in developing creation, but it needs to take account of such factors as structured social relationships and the relationship of humans to the physical environment, and it should examine the spirits (or the religious response to God) that motivates or directs our cultural development. Hence these four “coordinates” are reminders of what should be present in each individual discipline or program. They also point to opportunities for connections between the disciplines as well as themes or objectives that need balanced attention in the overall curriculum.

In addition to these content “coordinates,” our *Framework* spells out some guidelines for designing or revising the curriculum, specifically regarding sequencing, coordination, pedagogy, assessment, and life-long learning. To be sure, these guidelines do not flow directly from specific Biblical injunctions such as “spare the rod and spoil the child,” nor is what is offered here meant to exhaust Biblical principles for learning. Rather, these guidelines flow from a Biblical world-view that sees the learning of wisdom as both an individual and communal activity. As Harry Fernhout points out, learning is “relational”: the Biblical model of “knowledge” is not merely a “thing” to possess and transmit (e.g. a “body of knowledge”), but a process of “coming to know” that includes “acknowledging” and responding in seeking a right relationship with others (i.e. with God, our fellow humans, and the whole creation). Education as “coming-to-know and knowing-in-relation,” Fernhout writes, is “a matter of guiding and equipping learners to deepen and bring to fruition the *knowing-relations* in which they live” so that they can become wise stewards of creation.^[11] In the spirit of Fernhout’s comments, our guidelines for curricular design remind us that education is a communal responsibility, that learning ought to correspond and witness to the complexity yet coherence of creation, that humans who seek wisdom should grow from simple childish faith and understanding to deepened, mature commitment and insight, and that college-level education should not mark the end of our learning, but rather should equip and open us to continue seeking wisdom as we live and work in the contemporary world.

3. Curricular Goals and Student Outcomes

In its last section the *Educational Framework* translates these curricular parameters into more specific statements of curricular goals and student outcomes. Our intent here is to provide specific objectives that flow from our vision for Christian learning, and by which we can assess both our curriculum and student learning.

IV. Employing the *Educational Framework*:

The *Educational Framework* includes specific learning goals and pedagogical guidelines that can be used in assessing and revising each program. Indeed, this framework has provided the foundation for Dordt College's Student Assessment program, which has won national recognition.^[12] And it has proved a valuable tool for review and significant revision of programs like our General Education core, Mathematics, Music, Education, and Psychology. Here I do not have time to give exhaustive analyses, but I would like to give you a taste of how the *Educational Framework* is being used by various departments at Dordt College to review their programs.

1. General Education Program (GEP) or core

Dordt College's General Education Committee (GEC) has built on the *Educational Framework* in three main phases:

First, we developed a "General Education Framework" that spelled out parameters and objectives that, according to the GEP Mission Statement, concerned "Christian discipleship in the common areas" of life, and focused especially on student learning in the areas of general religious foundations, the overall structural and historical contexts and common skills for specialized programs, and on areas of common concern (see *Appendix 1*: "General Education Framework," Excerpts, "Mission").

Most importantly, the GEP Framework identified GEP-specific goals and student outcomes based on the four coordinates of the *Educational Framework* (see *Appendix 1*: "General Education Framework," Excerpts, "Curricular Goals..."). Using the *Framework*, we were able to identify central objectives that we believed all our students needed to achieve in order to be prepared for more specialized study, and also to become mature Christian disciples throughout their lives. Along with identifying such objectives, the "General Education Framework" describes "organizational contours" and "foci" for the GEP (see *Appendix 1*: "General Education Framework," Excerpts, "Curricular Foci..."). In setting out those contours and foci, we posit that the GEP should be not merely a smorgasbord of unrelated introductory courses, but rather a distinct program having its own unity and coherence while providing links to specialized programs. As described in "Curricular Foci," we envision that the GEP should begin by "tapping into" students' lives as whole, late-adolescent persons and cultivating the foundations for more advanced Christian discipleship and learning, such as through the study of a Biblical survey and a basic writing course, but also through cultivating worship and volunteer service projects, and examining their own identity and calling. At an intermediate level, the GEP requires study of the broad structural and historical context in which we live through disciplinary and inter-disciplinary courses such as those in the natural and social sciences, history, and the arts. The GEP culminates in a capstone "GEN 300" course for seniors that aims to have students bring together their varied expertise to examine a spectrum of issues in the contemporary world and begin to form their Christian responses to those issues.

Second, using this "General Education Framework," we could begin assessing our GEP in terms of our own objectives. For example, we developed a scoring grid to be filled out for each course in the GEP so that we could inventory which objectives were being addressed and at what point in the curriculum, and which objectives were being neglected. We also interacted with our campus-wide Student

Assessment Committee, which uses both standardized national tests like the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)^[13] test and a customized “Social Challenges Essay” that all freshmen and senior students are required to write, to enable us to track whether students are achieving our objectives. Student responses in the “Social Challenges Essay” are scored for their level of reflection in the following six categories: critical thinking; moral reasoning; worldview awareness; understanding and use of Biblical themes; perception of responsibility; and historical/structural analysis. In addition to such program and campus-wide assessment, we also began assessing individual courses in the GEP in terms of our “General Education Framework.”

Using these various assessment results, we also have begun incrementally to revise the GEP. In 1997 we developed a tentative “reconceptualization” of the GEP that proposed how existing courses in the GEP might “fit,” with some revision, in relation to our “General Education Framework,” especially in the ways that they met our GEP objectives and contours (see *Appendix 2: “Excerpt of Memo Re: Reconceptualizing the GEP”*). Beginning this spring we also began a comprehensive review of the GEP, in which we expect to hold the entire core program to the standards set out in the GE Framework. We believe that the *Framework* and subsequent assessment in terms of that *Framework* give us an excellent foundation and resources to re-examine our curriculum.

2. Math

Though by no means in lockstep, other more specialized disciplines have also found the *Educational Framework* helpful in examining their programs. In their recent program review, Dordt College’s Mathematics department used the *Framework* to help them articulate a set of curricular goals and student outcomes, and instructional goals, by which in turn it assessed its curriculum. The department still is considering the results of their assessment, but their use of the *Framework* enabled them to examine, in a systematic way, a wide-ranging set of questions about how their program equips students not only with standard mathematical knowledge, but also with some insight into how mathematics relates to God’s creation, and how it may increase our understanding of and enable us to serve God and his world.

3. Psychology

Dordt College’s Psychology department likewise used the *Educational Framework* to restate their curricular goals by which to assess its program. Among other things, their assessment using these goals led them to the conclusion that they needed to introduce students to a more thorough critical faith-based perspective, and to teach research skills earlier in their program so that their students could achieve mature preparation for both Christian service and advanced Christian scholarship.

4. Education

Our Education department has the challenging task of satisfying *both* Dordt College's goal of preparing teachers with a Christian view of students and education and extensive state requirements for the teaching profession (specified in the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium [INTASC]). They have done so by carefully translating the *Educational Framework's* detailed attention to religious orientation, structure, development, and contemporary response to state standards, so as to develop a coherent vision for Christian education (see the department's program at: http://www.dordt.edu/academics/departments/education/teacher_program/program_standards.pdf).

V. Conclusion

Admittedly, the nuts and bolts of defining and assessing a curriculum's structure and objectives is laborious, technical work. My point in demonstrating them is to show that a Christian college or university needs to work systematically at implementing its confession and vision. Too often, Christian educational institutions profess glowing visions of Christian education, but then proceed to implement curricula that embody unexamined goals and methods for learning. Dordt College's *Educational Framework* is intended to offer "coordinates" and "guidelines" for ensuring that our curriculum is directed by, and gives creational and scholarly flesh to our confession of Christ's lordship. Of course, such efforts need to be carried into every course and classroom. I hope, in any case, that my demonstration illustrates how Christians might not only revive the Christian soul at the heart of the university, but also ensure that this soul breathes a faithful, Biblical perspective throughout the curriculum of a Christian university or college. And I welcome your suggestions of how we might do so more fully.

Appendix I:

"General Education Framework, 15 December 1994" Excerpts

I. B. Mission Statement:

The General Education Program prepares students for faithful, ongoing Christian discipleship in the common areas and responsibilities of contemporary life and across all vocations. It articulates the general religious foundation and the overall structural and cultural/historical contexts for other curricular programs, and it provides a forum for addressing issues of common concern on that basis.

II. Curricular Goals and Student Outcomes for the General Education Program

A. Religious Orientation:

1. Christ-Centered Basis of Life and Learning:

The GEP initiates, promotes, and supports biblically directed scholarship in such a way that students:

- a. Acknowledge Christ as Lord of all creation and recognize the kingdom context of life and learning;
- b. Accept the authority of Scripture as divine revelation and know how it relates to Christ as the Word Incarnate and to creational revelation;
- c. Learn how to read Scripture, making use of Reformed hermeneutical principles;
- d. Can articulate the main events, themes, and teachings of the Bible;
- e. Can discern the implication of Christ's Kingship and other biblical realities for understanding, coping with, and transforming

contemporary life.

2. Reformed World-view:

- The GEP develops a cohesive Christian world-view within the Reformed tradition in such a way that students can:
- Recognize the centrality of faith and worldview commitments for all people and all aspects of life and culture;
 - Show an appreciation for and an understanding of a mature Reformational world-view;
 - Learn how to identify and challenge the dominant world-views and spirits of our age in the light of God's Word;
 - Show an increasing desire to serve the Lord in all aspects of their life.

B. Creational Structure

1. Overall Structure and Character of Creation:

The GEP provides a general framework for understanding how our world is structured and for contextualizing specialized courses and programs, and it also presents the broad contours of different kinds of human response to creation so that students:

- Acknowledge all of reality as the creation of God and under his sovereign rule;
- Appreciate both the rich diversity and the coherent inter-relatedness of creation;
- Recognize themselves as responsible creatures subject to creational laws within a variety of given conditions;
- Learn to think about issues in the light of creational structures and God-given norms;
- Exhibit a basic understanding of broad fields of study with regard to their main themes, principles, methods of inquiry,

interconnections, and contributions to contemporary life.

2. Integral Structure of Learning

The GEP provides learning experiences for developing a comprehensive holistic approach to understanding contemporary issues so that students:

- Understand how particular disciplines fit into the overall curriculum;
- Learn how to combine insights from their fields of specialization with those from other fields.

3. Educational Responsibility and Competency

The GEP introduces and cultivates those learning skills, habits, sensibilities, and attitudes needed to develop, share, and apply serviceable insight across all programs and in everyday life so that students:

- Develop the academic skills needed to discover, understand, and communicate knowledge in various fields of study;
- Develop the interpersonal skills needed to work cooperatively with others in community;
- Develop the personal traits needed to live responsibly before God and in harmony with the rest of creation.

C. Creational Development

1. Unfolding of Creation

The GEP provides a general framework for understanding how the world has unfolded and for contextualizing specialized courses and programs, and it also presents the main contours of the development of various historically important civilizations so that students:

- Appreciate the dynamic nature of reality as the progressive disclosure of the potential within creation;
- See the formation of civilizations as the cultural embodiment of communal human responses to God, and thus as

fundamentally religious in motivation;

- Understand how historical developments (events, institutions, theories, inventions, artistic responses) have shaped our present world and Western culture in particular;
- Are acquainted with the main landmarks and turning points in the history of Christianity, especially within the Reformed tradition, and are aware of the role that Christianity has played in the development of Western culture;
- Understand and appreciate the main features and development of some culture(s) other than their own.

2. Cultural Mandate and Human Task

The GEP presents the divine obligation given to human beings as image bearers of God to develop and care for his creation (the cultural/stewardship mandate) so that students:

- Understand and value their calling to participate in culture formation as image bearers of God: as ruling stewards and caretakers of his world, and as citizens of his Kingdom;
- Show respect and concern for the creation and work for justice and peace between races, genders, and human social groupings.

D. Contemporary Response

1. Timely and Relevant Concerns

The GEP addresses main areas of common everyday life so that students:

- Are aware of the scope and magnitude of our communal human responsibility in today's world;
- Are familiar with the pressing problems of our culture and our age and can begin to articulate Christian solutions to them;
- Are able to identify areas where they can be of service, matching their talents and resources with needs.

2. Ongoing Responsibilities

The GEP provides the general resources and opportunities needed to prepare for life-long learning so that students:

- Can develop personal initiative and apply their learning to new situations;
- Can develop an integral Christian approach to the important issues of contemporary life;
- Can work cooperatively with others to generate serviceable insight and seek genuine solutions to problems;
- Can communicate their ideas and vision effectively.

3. Christian Lifestyle and Kingdom Service

The GEP promotes a life of communal Christian discipleship and prepares students for service in today's world by providing opportunities for active participation so that students:

- a. Cultivate a close relation to God through prayer, worship, and study of Scripture;
- b. Develop the attitudes, character, and behavior that demonstrate the acquisition of biblical insight (wisdom) and that promote a life of Christian discipleship;
- c. View their cultural responsibilities in the light of Christ's Kingdom;
- d. Learn to set priorities and act accordingly;
- e. Learn practical strategies for effective service and responsible dialogue in environments that are largely opposed to Christian principles and action.

IV. Curricular Foci of the General Education Program

B. Main Tasks of the GEP

The following points indicate various tasks that the GEP should be designed to accomplish with respect to the overall program. While individual courses and learning experiences may be weighted more heavily toward one main task than another, they might also be designed to contribute to several of them.

1. Providing a Broad Foundation (Pre-Disciplinary Studies)
 - a. Foundational studies for the overall curriculum
 - i. Basic religious orientation/Reformed perspective
 - ii. Competencies/advanced learning skills
 - b. Foundational studies for contemporary life
 - i. Lifestyle choices and interpersonal skills; building community; resource management
 - ii. Attitudes toward social, groups, cultures, the environment, mass media, technology, etc.
 - iii. Learning skills for continuing life-long education
2. Providing a Coherent Context (Cross-Disciplinary Studies)
 - a. Cross-disciplinary perspectives on fields of study
 - i. Synoptic overview of creational structure
 - ii. Synoptic overview of cultural/historical development
 - b. Structure and development of main areas of knowledge across the disciplines
 - i. Natural sciences: mathematics, physical sciences, life sciences, technical and applied natural sciences (agriculture, health, engineering, computer science)
 - ii. Social sciences: psychology, languages, sociology, economics, political science, applied social sciences (communication, social work, business, physical education and recreation, education)
 - iii. Arts and humanities: art, literature, music, theater arts, theology, history, philosophy
3. Providing a Forum for Relevant Applications (Post-Disciplinary Studies)

This part of the GEP is meant to introduce students to major themes and issues of importance for contemporary life, and to provide a platform on which several disciplines can collaboratively address them in an integrated fashion. Students and faculty from a variety of disciplines can together explore an issue for which they have the requisite background or expertise. Topics in this portion of the GEP should show the applicability of a wide range of fields of study to a common problem or issue. They should also change over time to remain current and relevant. Possible examples include:

- a. The environment
- b. Cultural diversity
- c. Alienation and intolerance in contemporary life
- d. Poverty and hunger
- e. Population growth and distribution
- f. Self-fulfillment: individuality within community
- g. Friendship, marriage, and family
- h. Mass media and entertainment
- i. Work and recreation
- j. The nature of freedom and law
- k. The role of science and technology in the modern world

Appendix 2:

“Memo Re: Reconceptualizing the GEP, May 20, 1997,” Excerpts

Reconceptualizing the Present GEP

Under the main categories given below, we have listed various subcategories that take the present state as our starting point, though interpreted through the eyes of the GEF.

I. Core Foundational Courses

A. Conceptual Basis: Historical-Redemptive Outlook

1. Biblical and Philosophical Foundations: THEO 101; PHIL 201
 2. Historical and Global Context: HIST 100
 3. Contemporary Culture: HIST 100? ENG 200? GEN 200?
- B. Introducing Academic Competencies
1. Quantitative Skills: MATH 106
 2. Critical Thinking / Analytic Skills: MATH 106; ENG 101; COMM 110
 3. Communication Skills: ENG 101; COMM 110; FL 201?
- II. Issue-Focused Contextual Interdisciplinary Courses
- A. [Issues Centered in Natural Science]
1. Living Universe: BIO 101, BIO 102; ENVR 151; HPER 010?
 2. Physical Universe and Technology: PHSC 107, PHSC 201; CMSC 010?
- B. [Issues Centered in Social Science]
1. Interpersonal Relations: PSYC 201; SOC 201; HPER 010? HPER 0XY?
 2. Societal Structures: PLSC 201; ECON 200, ECON 201, ECON 202; SOC 201
- C. [Issues Centered in Humanities]
1. Artistic Response: GEN 200; ENG 200
 2. Global / Cross Cultural Studies: FL 201; HIST 212, HIST 213, HIST 214
 3. Advanced Foundational Studies: THEO 201, THEO 204; PHIL 206, PHIL 320, PHIL 333, PHIL 350
- III. Post-Disciplinary Capstone Course
- A. Integrated Capstone / Bridge to Post-College Life: GEN 300

Guidelines for Curricular Reform

II. Curricular Matters: Task Specific

- A. Core Foundational Courses: Conceptual Basis
1. Foundational Character

Courses that provide the conceptual basis for the GEP should develop themes and perspectives needed to provide an integrated religious, structural, and historical foundation for the overall curriculum and a contemporary Christian lifestyle, and they should make these ideas and their foundational character central in their organization and subject matter.

2. Integration and Follow-Up

Foundational courses should be coordinated to provide a strong foundation for the GEP. Their relevance to other areas of study in the GEP, the overall curriculum, and contemporary life should be demonstrated; foundational courses should be *upwardly and outwardly directed*. Faculty teaching these courses should work cooperatively with one another to build an interconnected conceptual foundation, and they should collaborate with the rest of the faculty in exploring ways to make this foundation actively function throughout the entire curriculum.

B. Core Foundational Courses: Introducing Academic Competencies

1. Foundational Character

Courses that introduce skills needed throughout the curriculum and in contemporary life should do so in a meaningful way that enhances the GEP and work done in the various majors.

2. Integration and Follow-Up

Courses that introduce academic skills should be coordinated, where possible, with one another and with other courses in the curriculum. Their relevance to other areas of study in the GEP, the overall curriculum, and contemporary Christian life should be clearly demonstrated. Faculty teaching these courses should work cooperatively with one another to build an interconnected foundation of academic competencies, and they should collaborate with the rest of the faculty in exploring ways to make these skills actively function throughout the entire curriculum.

C. Issue-Focused Contextual Interdisciplinary Courses

1. Interdisciplinary Character

Courses that study aspects, issues, and problems of contemporary life from the vantage point of the natural sciences, the social sciences, or the humanities / arts should do so in a way that exhibits the characteristically distinctive ways in which people in those fields of investigation approach issues, demonstrates their underlying assumptions about creational structure, reveals their connections with other fields, points out the relevant historical developments that shaped their approach, etc. They should be elementary, but not introductions to disciplines; they should show how the thinking and procedures of various disciplines can together shed light on a significant problem, trend, or aspect of contemporary life by their particular perspectives. These courses should thus be designed to explore selected topics or issues from a broad, interdisciplinary basis.

2. Contemporary Relevance

Courses that study aspects, issues, and problems of contemporary life from the vantage point of the natural sciences, the social sciences, or the humanities / arts should be issue-oriented rather than discipline-oriented. They should be *outwardly directed*, showing the relevance of these main areas of thought / action for our contemporary everyday life as Christians, not inwardly focused on the structure of the discipline. Faculty teaching these courses should work cooperatively with one another, and they should collaborate with the rest of the faculty in exploring the relevance and necessary interconnection of their several perspectives for addressing contemporary issues.

D. Post-Disciplinary Capstone Course

1. Capstone Character

This course should help students synthesize their earlier work in different GEP courses and majors by asking them to explore and develop Christian responses to broad contemporary issues in everyday life that have immediate relevance and lasting significance.

2. Bridge Character

This course should prepare students to enter public life as thoughtful, caring Christian disciples. Issues dealt with should be central to the life of today's Christian community. It should discuss strategies and resources that can be used by students in presenting a Christian witness to the world, both with respect to working with Christians of other viewpoints and within settings where the dominant spirit is in opposition to a Christian lifestyle. Faculty teaching this course should collaborate with the rest of the faculty in exploring how students can be better prepared to enter post-college life.

[1] See Association of American Colleges and Universities, "General Education and Assessment: Generating Commitment, Value, and Evidence" (March 4-6, Long Beach California). Resources available online at: <http://www.aacu.edu/meetings/generaleducation/index.cfm>.

[2] Nuria M. Cuevas, Elsie M. Barnes, Alexei G. Matveev, "Aligning Institutional Structure for Student Achievement," unpublished presentation to the AAC&U conference on "General Education and Assessment: Generating Commitment, Value, and Evidence," Long Beach California, 4-6 March 2004.

[3] Reference to these "waves" of General Education revision is summarized from an unpublished paper given by my colleague and the former chairperson of Dordt College's General Education Committee. See Calvin Jongmsma, "General Education: Why Do We Need It, and Where Did it Come From?" (Unpublished paper delivered to the Dordt College Faculty Workshop, May 1996).

[4] See Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

[5] The *Educational Framework of Dordt College* (1993) is available online at: http://www.dordt.edu/publications/faculty_handbook/1-2-2.shtml#1.2.2.

[6] Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty (1880)," in *Abraham Kuyper; A Centennial Reader*, James D. Bratt, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

[7] For elaboration on this point, see John H. Kok, "Learning to Teach From Within a Christian Perspective," *Pro Rege*, XXXI, No. 4

(June 2003), 11-19.

[8] These goals are articulated in a series of Dordt College institutional statements, including *Statement of Purpose* (1961), *Scripturally-Oriented Higher Education* (1968), *The Educational Task of Dordt College* (1979, revised 1996), available online at: http://www.dordt.edu/publications/faculty_handbook/1-2.shtml#1.2.1 .

[9] See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill, ed., Ford Lewis Battle, trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), Book I, ch. VI, 1.

[10] Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton provide a helpful discussion of the nature and role of world-view. World-views provide basic, though sometimes unreflective answers to such questions as "who am I?" "where am I?" "what's wrong?" and "what's the remedy?" World-views thereby provide the "filter" by which we interpret our experience, and also the "vision" which guides our action. See *The Transforming Vision; Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 31-35. Another excellent discussion of the role of religious beliefs in scientific theorizing is Roy Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

[11] Harry Fernhout, "Serviceable Insight: Wisdom at Work," paper presented to the IAPCHE Conference, Dordt College, Summer 2000, published in *Marginal Resistance: Essays Dedicated to John C. Vander Stelt* (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt Press, 2001), 109-127. See especially p. 121.

[12] See, for example, K. E. Bussema, "Who am I? Whose am I? Identity and Faith in the College Years," *Research on Christian Higher Education*, Vol. 6, 1-33.

[13] Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research & Planning, *National Survey of Student Engagement; The College Student Report* (Bloomington, IN). Available online at: www.iub.edu/~nsse .