Learning from Libermann: Some Practical Thoughts for Academic Administrators

Edward Kocher

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Learning from Libermann: Some Practical Thoughts for Academic Administrators

This article will 1) provide a brief perspective on the role of a dean; 2) give some context regarding the development of my administrative work; and 3) give examples of lessons learned from Father Libermann regarding “delicate courtesy,” “openness to diversity,” and “developing talent.”

The Role of a Dean

A dean functions as a servant leader in academic middle management, reporting to two highly educated constituencies—the University administration and the faculty. Beyond the campus green, a music dean contributes to the life of local, regional, and national cultural and academic communities. In his book *Deaning*, my former academic advisor and teacher Van Cleve Morris states:

The dean level of academic administration provides a unique vantage point from which to view the entire organization. For one thing, it is the only line position that enjoys routine, in contrast with ad hoc, contact with the full spectrum of organizational elements - students, faculty, department heads, fellow deans, vice-presidents, and president, not to mention staff persons at all levels. The deanship is the seat of personnel administration, the heart of any organization. More than any other officer lower or higher in the hierarchy, a dean is the person responsible for the caliber of academic employees. Moreover, in daily work a dean deals primarily with people, not paper.²

An Opportunity to Learn about Father Libermann

At this writing, I am completing a fourth and final term of service as dean of Duquesne’s excellent Mary Pappert School of Music. My early preparation for serving as a dean began in high school when I became a serious musician and started a journey through a series of educational, teaching, performing, and administrative experiences that helped to form my foundations of leadership. My administrative internship deepened at my previous university, DePaul University in Chicago, IL, where I served for two decades as a professor, department chair, and
Dr. Edward Kocher

...I experienced the “delicate courtesy” attributed to Father Libermann in A Light to the Gentiles.

associate dean. At DePaul, our understanding of Catholic Higher Education was shaped by St. Vincent DePaul, the inspiration of the university that bears his name. There, we celebrated St. Vincent’s compassion, gentleness, and ministry to the poor. When I arrived at Duquesne, I was introduced to the Spiritans, one hundred music faculty, fifteen staff, three hundred fifty music students, a welcoming campus community and a robust extended regional and national musical community. From my first encounters with the Spiritans at Duquesne, I experienced the “delicate courtesy” attributed to Father Libermann in A Light to the Gentiles.

Delicate Courtesy

In speaking of Father Libermann, Father La Vavasseur states:

One of the things that contributed most to his success in any transaction was his delicate courtesy. His judgment was excellent and he was vividly, keenly, delicately sensitive. When he had to act, he mentally exchanged places with the people concerned and tried to imagine how he would feel if someone treated him as he intended to deal with them. He often said to me…”Try to feel within yourself what impression your actions or word will make on others.”

In looking back, I can see that the influence of Father Libermann was deeply entrenched on campus when my first visit to Duquesne University occurred in summer 2000. The purpose of the visit was to interview for the position of dean of the Mary Pappert School of Music. Even though I had performed concerts throughout the US and Europe, this was my first visit to Pittsburgh. As a twenty-year veteran of Catholic Higher Education, I felt comfortable on Duquesne’s lovely urban campus and with the warm hospitality shown by the search committee and the University administration. The two-day interview process on the Duquesne campus was grueling, but my feelings of ease with Duquesne increased with every meeting. On the second day, I shared lunch with the deans and the vice president for student life, Father Sean Hogan, C.S.Sp. Father Hogan began the luncheon with a tender, reflective invocation, asking God to be with my family and me as we made difficult decisions. His prayer was heartfelt and inviting and it touched me deeply. With that invocation, Father Hogan conveyed a sense of delicate courtesy that set a wonderful tone for my future work at Duquesne and offered a glimpse of the many gifts that our Spiritans would show me throughout my service to Duquesne.
Father Hogan’s encouraging welcome was enlarged and amplified robustly in the weeks that followed. When I was appointed to the faculty to serve as dean, I discovered that an important element of my role was to serve as a Spiritan Campus Minister in support of our Mission. At Duquesne, it is evident that the mission “to serve God by serving students” permeates all aspects of campus life. Each year the various offices that make up the Division of Mission and Identity host events and programs that bring the mission to life on and off campus for the Duquesne community. As a newcomer to Spiritan Campus Ministry, the opportunity to participate in campus programs provided a superb opportunity to learn and grow in the Spiritan tradition. The Mass of the Holy Spirit, Founders Week, and Libermann Luncheons are three campus traditions that helped me develop an increased openness to diversity.

**Openness to Diversity**

Live in peace with the outside world. Be genuine in your dealings with poor Frenchmen who have no religion…

In general, you ought to like all men, no matter how they may feel about religious principles or about you.4

The Mass of the Holy Spirit is the traditional opening of the academic year when we pray for God’s guidance and protection in the coming school year. People of all faiths are welcome. Founders Week is an annual university-wide celebration to honor the legacy, vision, and values of Duquesne’s Spiritan founders. Held in early February, the event features activities focused around Spiritan education, the university’s mission, and how the university community lives that mission each day. Spiritan Campus Ministry hosts a reflective Libermann Luncheon monthly throughout the academic year. The Libermann Luncheons consist of a simple meal followed by an informational and inspirational presentation. Over the years, I have attended many Libermann Luncheons and, without exception, have always left the meal with a motivation to do better in my service to students, faculty, and administration. When a tongue-in-cheek Father Ray French C.S.Sp offered that I was the “official trombonist” of Spiritan Campus Ministry, I was tickled to be invited to perform on the trombone at a Libermann Luncheon with my colleague, Professor Guenko Guechev, Chair of Voice and Opera. We performed a musical selection based on a beautiful poem, “The Windhover” by the Jesuit priest, Fr. Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J. Composer Newell Kay Brown set the poem for the unusual combination of bass voice and trombone. At the luncheon, Professor Guechev and I explained the complex vocabulary, rhythm, and melody of the poetry and music, and demonstrated the flight of a windhover (European Kestrel) via...
video. We performed the six-minute composition twice and concluded the raptor themed luncheon with a community sing of the familiar hymn, *On Eagles Wings*, accompanied on piano most capably by music student, Amanda Plazek. The luncheon attendees reported that they especially appreciated the diverse elements of our performance. Our performance entourage consisted of a Scottish Spiritan master of ceremonies, an operatic singer from Bulgaria, a symphonic trombonist from Chicago, a pianist from Pittsburgh, a composer from Salt Lake City, a Victorian Jesuit poet from England, and a kestrel from Europe.

**Developing Talent**

Earlier in this article, I pointed out Morris’ assertion that “the deanship is the seat of personnel administration, the heart of any organization.” Regarding personnel administration, I have learned much from following Father Libermann’s teachings regarding developing talent. Here are some expressions of this culled from Fr. Van Kaam.

Libermann’s constant preoccupation with the problem of developing leaders in the Church.

In the midst of his prodigious activity, Father Libermann never lost sight of his first love: the guidance of priests.

Father Libermann insists that we begin by gratefully accepting as a treasure from God’s hands the nature we have received.\(^5\)

Musicians live in a world of seeking perfection. In order to achieve the highest levels of performance, a musician exercises strict discipline, gives inordinate amounts of time to the task, and listens with an uncompromising critical ear. Over time, the perfection seeking mindset can erode confidence and spawn feelings of inferiority. Father Libermann’s advice regarding encouraging good people is highly applicable to the music faculty. He observed:

It seems to me that it is utterly necessary to lift the spirits of good people who are too conscious of character weaknesses. They have to be buoyed up, made to understand and feel that they are free, and made to sense the beauty of that freedom and equality which they share with all God’s children. The idea of inferiority should be rooted out of their minds, for it further weakens their natural aptitude and lowers them in their own estimation. That’s very bad.\(^6\)
Moving Forward

My decanal service to Duquesne is nearing its conclusion. It has been a magical deanship that has given my wife Kamie and I a treasure trove of beautiful friends and memories. Soon, in my role as the William Francis Power Faculty Chair in Academic Leadership, I will speak about “Communicating in the Academy” at the annual meeting of the National Association of Schools of Music. An important part of my presentation will be to share the maxims of Father Francis Libermann. Father Libermann was a leadership expert, espousing perennial themes that have been echoed many times in the leadership literature throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Here is some of his advice:

Never act hastily or impatiently, when you meet obstacles, but wait peacefully till these obstacles be removed; and if they cannot be removed, step over them, or turn them around.7

Libermann regarded problems and difficulties as important factors in the process of maturation.8

Francis envisioned simplicity as a courageous and genuine faithfulness to what is really authentic in us, to what is in accord with God’s plan for us.9

Take a measured approach to policy. Never listen to the first thought that comes to your mind. Let it mature before you put faith in it, especially if it was an idea that seized you violently and stirred you up to some degree.10

He called for a general refinement in business affairs.11

In A Light to the Gentiles, Father Adrian van Kaam offers this superb summation.

His portrait of the new apostle, then, is one of a man who develops that great gift of God, his own personality, as broadly and richly as he can—not by repressing his nature and throttling his aptitudes, but by unfolding his individuality with the help of grace. He is receptive and attentive to the ever-changing situation around him, always keeping his mental and emotional balance lest mere impressions and feeling dominate him. He is realistic, precise, and practical. He plans his projects carefully and with full psychological understanding of men and situations. Always a gentleman, he cultivates courtesy, politeness, and personal neatness. He is full of good will and tolerance toward others, yet courageous in facing the hardest tasks. The ideal that Father Libermann holds up is a timeless one valid for all ages and climes.12
In closing, I thank Father Okoye for the invitation to share these thoughts and extend my warmest wishes to the readers of this article in hopes that Father Francis Libermann’s ideas will further inspire our service to the Church, the community, the nation, and the world.

Dr. Edward Kocher
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Endnotes
1(Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University, 1959).
5Ibid., 227, 258, 259 respectively.
6Ibid., 261.
7Goepfert, Prosper. *The Life of the Venerable Francis Mary Paul Libermann: Founder of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary.* (Dublin: M. H. Gill &Son, 1880), 485.
8Van Kaam, *A Light to the Gentiles,* 262.
9Ibid., 264.
10Ibid., 267.
11Ibid., 273.
12Ibid., 274-275.
Since the 1980’s, institutions have been thinking structurally and programmatically about the ways they engage their local communities through academic, co-curricular, and institutional strategies. Community engagement, sometimes referred to as civic engagement, is the common terminology for the umbrella of ways a university collaborates with its local community.

Community engagement describes the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. The purpose of community engagement is the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good. (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2006)

Provost Timothy Austin suggested that we develop a graphic to illustrate the relationship between the various forms of community engagement and to help position the academic forms of community engagement that are generally grouped under the heading of community-engaged scholarship …that is …the civic activities that span teaching, learning, and research (see Figure 1: Organization of Community-Higher Education Civic Engagements). As you can see, there are other strategies of community engagement that fall within the co-curricular and institutional areas. There are also forms of experiential learning that do not serve civic purposes. These would include traditional internships, study abroad, and forms of corporate consulting work. Although they are a form of community engagement, they are not civic engagement.

In figure 2, I give a brief history of recent community engagement at Duquesne since 1987. Though not exhaustive, you will see that the forms of community engagement included in the timeline are illustrative of the types of engagement within
Community Engagement

Community-Engaged Scholarship
(civic involvement across teaching, learning, and research)

Community-engaged Teaching
(Pedagogies such as Service-Learning)

Community-engaged Learning
(Experiential activities, e.g. non-profit internships, cultural immersions)

Community-engaged Research
(Of ten involves undergraduate research)

Co-curricular Engagement

Institutional-Community Engagement

Students engage local communities outside the formal curriculum through activities such as:
1. Community Service
2. Intentional community-based living
3. Community-based work study

Institution adopts civic commitments as an:
1. Economic Development Participant
2. Steward of Place
3. Anchor Institution

Figure 1: Organization of Community-Higher Education Civic Engagements
Duquesne’s Recent History of Community Engagement (1987 - 2014)

1987:
- Spring break immersions (now known as cross-cultural mission experiences) began in Immokalee, FL and West Virginia
- Duquesne University Volunteers begun by student in her junior year

1989:
- Spring Clean Up began

1990:
- Duquesne University Volunteers begun by student in her junior year

1993:
- University-Community Collaborative Project is developed with the hiring of Emma C. Mosley

1994:
- Nurse Managed Wellness Center was established in St. Justin’s Plaza on Mt. Washington. Now there are 10 Centers known as Community-based Health and Wellness Centers for Older Adults

1995:
- Community Outreach Partnership Center funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Focused on the Hill District and East Liberty.

1996:
- DePaul weekly outreach to the homeless began by student in his sophomore year

2000:
- Psychology Clinic begins to partner with entities in the Hill District

2005:
- Office of Service-Learning created to support service-learning classes

2007:
- Duquesne is founding partner of the Pittsburgh Central Keystone Innovation Zone, an economic development and bio-technology spin-off engine
- Charles Owen Rice on the Road Lecture Series adopts Community Engagement as delivery method

2008:
- University is awarded the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement in the area of curricular engagement, partnerships, and outreach.

2009:
- Office of Service-Learning created to support service-learning classes

2010:
- Center for Pharmacy Services founded in the Hill District

2012:
- Duquesne provided meeting space and nonprofit incorporation assistance for the founding of Uptown Partners (Uptown’s community and economic development organization)

2013:
- Tribone Center for Clinical Legal Education founded on Fifth Avenue in Uptown

2013:
- Duquesne is founding partner of the Pittsburgh Central Keystone Innovation Zone, an economic development and bio-technology spin-off engine

2014:
- Charles Owen Rice on the Road Lecture Series adopts Community Engagement as delivery method

Figure 1: Timeline of Recent Community Engagement (1987-2014)
figure 1. Although it is not included in figure 2, it is important to highlight one of our earliest examples of community engaged scholarship. In 1962, Associate Professor Charles Unkovic of the Sociology department collaborated with stakeholders of Hazelwood to produce the “Hazelwood Neighborhood Survey.” This collaborative research was developed to address the profound distress being experienced by the Hazelwood community in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s. This is one of our oldest examples of community-engaged scholarship and is part of the legacy that we continue to support. It also represents a challenge: have our collaborations with our local communities yielded appreciable change for the people who live there? Or, as in the case of Hazelwood, do we continue to recreate the same set of engagements over time with little measurable change?

It is evident that a high volume of activity occurs across the University’s divisions and schools. It is because of this rate of involvement that the University chose to pursue the 2008 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching’s Community Engagement Classification. The Community Engagement Classification is only held by some 300 institutions of higher education across the nation, and it requires the completion of an exhaustive self-study that documents not only the frequency of community engagement but also its quality, depth, sustainability, and impacts (to both University constituents and the communities being served). We achieved the classification in 2008 and held that distinction until this year, in which we were required to reapply as per the conditions of the classification. Having the opportunity to chair the University’s self-study for the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement, both in 2008 and in this recent year, has provided me with a vantage point from which to see the strengths of our community engagement efforts as well as our challenges.

In terms of strengths, the Spiritan charism provides a strong platform on which our efforts are built. As the nation has paid closer attention to civic learning amongst college graduates within higher accreditation bodies, the US Department of Education, and various higher education associations, certain civic development outcomes have been stated as desirable. Many of these, such as working for justice, having the knowledge and skill to enact social change as a community member and professional, and comfortably collaborating with people across racial, socioeconomic, and cultural divides (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012) are quite evident in our Spiritan nature.
Another strength we enjoy is a strong network of community agency partners and community leaders who wish to collaborate with Duquesne University. A student body that exhibits exceptionally high rates of volunteerism and a robust corps of faculty who are dedicated to engaged teaching and engaged research complements this. Interestingly, the majority of prospective faculty being interviewed for our open positions express interest community-engaged teaching and research opportunities. Finally, our last strength is that we have a good number of programs and initiatives throughout the divisions that support student and faculty involvement in the community.

As you can imagine, having completed an exhaustive self-study, which we chose to follow up with an external program review of our community-engaged scholarship activities, has made clear the challenges that we face. In conversation with Provost Austin, we agreed that there are three that we would like to bring to your attention.

Being known as a University committed to service can have a downside. Generally, the meaning associated with service here at Duquesne (amongst the students, within our institutional rhetoric, and also among some of the faculty) is a set of charitable activities such as volunteerism, philanthropy, and clothing and food donations. This can lead us to divest from building authentic relationships with people who are on the margins and give preference to acts that make us feel good about giving back. While charity is critical in the absence of justice, we cannot ignore our opportunity to engage a diverse set of civic activities that involve us in changing unjust conditions. As an example, community-based research can be a very deep form of civic involvement that has transformational learning opportunities for students within their disciplines.

The second challenge I highlight is that in some instances, the vehicle, or mode, of community engagement has become the end point rather than a means to improve community conditions and help our students develop civically. An example of this is service-learning. In a recent program-wide assessment, we learned that students who take service-learning classes have very significant increases in disciplinary learning but exhibit few or no demonstrable gains in civic or social responsibility. In light of our Spiritan charism and the goals for service-learning that we articulate in our core curriculum, this is troubling.

A third area of challenge is concerned with the role of community engagement within faculty work. Currently,
the faculty handbook does not include community-engaged scholarship (those activities that span teaching, learning, and research) or provide description of how these are distinct from work that is considered service (such as membership in University committees). Given the high frequency of such work and the growing number of incoming faculty who choose to pursue community-engaged teaching and research, it is vital that we understand its role within faculty performance and that, further, our department chairs and school leadership know how to evaluate the quality of community-engaged scholarship.

I have given a brief overview of community engagement, albeit a whirlwind tour. It is difficult to quickly summarize all that we’ve learned from our yearlong self-study of engagement and external review. We finalized the last draft of our Carnegie Community Engagement Classification self-study in February and it is with the Provost and his colleagues at this time. We will be submitting it on or before April 15th and will know in January of 2015 if we will continue to hold this acknowledgement for the next five years.

Dr. Lina D. Dostilio
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Endnotes
1Remarks presented to the Duquesne University Board of Trustees Executive Committee, March 21, 2014.
3There are only two copies of the Unkovic report and they are housed at the Heinz History Center and the Harrisburg Library. The Office of Service-Learning maintains a copy of the first chapter of the report.
Spiritan Horizons seeks to further research into the history, spirituality, and tradition of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. In line with the aims of the Center for Spiritan Studies at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, its overall goal is to promote creative fidelity to the Spiritan charism in the contemporary world. The journal includes articles of a scholarly nature as well as others related to the praxis of the Spiritan charism in a wide variety of cultural contexts. Special attention is given in each issue to the Spiritan education ethos, in view of the university setting in which the journal is published.

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