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## That Elusive "Something"

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*...gently hinted that the ‘something’ was not as elusive as I made it out to be...*

Some years ago, I met with the assistant director of Spiritan Campus Ministry to work on a training session for students working in the campus residence halls. We talked about the history and mission of Duquesne. At the time, I had newly graduated from Duquesne with a bachelor's degree in chemistry. While working as a graduate assistant on campus during the academic year, I had spent the summer working in a laboratory and making connections for future long term work there. We got to talking about how I didn't think I wanted to work in a laboratory setting anymore, and how there was just ‘something’ special and different about working at Duquesne. She let me go on for a while, and I kept mentioning this ‘something’. She kind of laughed and gently hinted that the ‘something’ was not as elusive as I made it out to be and that it was simply our Duquesne Mission. This was the first time I really thought about what the Mission of Duquesne University as a Catholic Spiritan institution means to me.

Evidence of the Duquesne University Mission Statement is everywhere. It is on every floor of our Living Learning Centers, in the Student Union, in our academic buildings, and even in a small frame on my desk. The mission is something that is so important to the people who work on Duquesne's campus. I think it means something slightly different to each of us, and we all apply it differently to our work. I am currently the resident director of Saint Ann Living Learning Center, a residence hall for approximately 575 freshmen on Duquesne campus. What does this mean exactly? Well, I live in the residence hall with my residents and am responsible for the day to day operations, in addition to helping my students' transition from high school to college as they deal with the pressures of living away from home for the first time. It is a job I absolutely love, and which I could not do without the guidance of our mission statement. The frame on my desk serves as a reminder of how the mission guides my daily activities.

**Finding Guidance from Libermann**

Before my conversation with the campus minister about the mission, I had never really thought about what the mission meant to me despite its ubiquitous presence on campus. I had the wallet sized card with the mission statement in my wallet since I was a freshman, and I had a lot of pride in my university. I was very thankful for the experience that it gave me and, at first, I didn't give this a great deal of thought. I then went over some of the things we had put together and looked at a quote I had pulled from Francis Libermann. It said, “*Try to keep your mind always free, bright and*

*open. This openness of mind and heart is indispensable for acquiring a true interior spirit. It is essential that you be open, simple and gentle with everyone. Be master then of your own soul and you will be master of the whole world.”* At this point I was a graduate assistant and needed to make some decisions about what I wanted to do in the next stage of my life. This quote meant so much to me and truly spoke to me. I figured it was probably a good idea to look into some other works from, and about, Francis Libermann.

*...calls us to integrate ourselves into the community we serve and determine what best meets their needs.*

What I found, of course, was a wealth of insight and writing on living in and serving a community. Libermann talked about being one with people, and how each community should hear the Gospel in the context of their culture. While I am not a missionary living in another country, I do live with a population that I feel called to serve. I feel that the idea of meeting a community, getting to know them, and then serving their needs is something Libermann implicitly encourages others to do. I am not teaching my residents about the Gospels in the context of their culture in the same way that our Spiritan Missionaries around the world have done, but I do try to help them model a Gospel life in their culture as I help them adjust to college life. It would be easy for me to do that within the context of my own college experience, but that is not what our mission calls us to do. It calls us to integrate ourselves into the community we serve and determine what best meets their needs. This is the ‘something’ that was so elusive, that made me so happy to do my job. Libermann understood that you could not begin to enter into a community and help a community if you did not first truly know a community. In my daily interactions with my residents, this is what my job calls me to do. Libermann did not speak directly of laypeople in his writings, as he was usually addressing seminarians and other church leaders, but spoke of an ecclesial community that shares the responsibility for evangelization. Our community here at Duquesne takes on the shared responsibility of living and perpetuating the mission.

*...I find myself looking for some grounding in what I am doing...*

Occasionally, I find myself looking for some grounding in what I am doing, both personally and professionally. At times I may lose sight of the ultimate goal I am working for, or get wrapped up in the small details of a project. I often read from the Spiritual Letters of Libermann to help regain my bearings. As many know, the topics are as varied as everyday Christian life, marriage, family, and sometimes even education. In a letter to his brother and sister-in-law, Libermann offers advice on the topic of education for his niece. He implores them to give her a solid education, one that is truly Christian and that will train her in both filial and saintly piety. The second part of this is to avoid the temptation of temporal advantages. He says they are ‘unreal’ and

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'vanish like smoke.' He beseeches his relatives to provide their daughter with true education; it will accompany her for the rest of her life and decide her everlasting happiness. I can't think of a place that is better suited than Duquesne University to offer this type of education. Without our mission guiding our activities, this would not be possible. When I lose sight of what I am doing, thinking about Liebermann's challenge, and that small frame on my desk, guides me back to where I need to be.

### **An education for the whole person**

Our mission calls us to create, and maintain, an ecumenical atmosphere open to diversity. This is just as important as our commitment to liberal and professional education. Liebermann writes to his family almost ten years later and again extols the values of a Christian education. He says this education will make its recipients great saints someday. He goes on to say that a focus solely on procuring a brilliant career for their children will yield value only in earthly terms. Liebermann again warns against putting too much stock in temporal prosperity and reiterates the importance of educating the whole person. This is what we do here; we pride ourselves on providing an education for the mind, heart, and spirit. I frequently find inspiration to do this from Liebermann. He holds that education should include the head, the heart and the hand while being for the benefit of the whole person. We say that our education does not end in the classroom; we even call our residence halls Living Learning Centers. This exemplifies that "full" education that Liebermann spoke of, one that we are so proud to offer.

A few examples of this distinctly Duquesne education stand out in my mind. In my time here I have had a chance to work with both the Honors College and the Liberal Arts Learning Communities. In both instances we strove for education that did not stop in the classroom. Efforts outside of the classroom were made to offer that "full" education. Last spring the freshmen students in my residence hall collected money to make micro-loans to businesses in Africa. We did this through the help of Kiva.org, a group that provides loans to businesses that do not have access to traditional banking systems. My residents made four \$25 donations, which is a sizeable contribution to struggling merchants. Through this program, education dwelt on the culture of the country the money was going to and on the actual process of microfinance.

*...traditional Sri Lankan  
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In the Honors College, programming is done to reflect the classroom experience the students are having. Last year, a class was studying South Asian literature, and reflective programming was done to enhance their experience. A traditional Sri Lankan

dinner was offered at night, which included education on the culture and people of Southern Asia.

In a similar manner, programming is offered as part of the College of Liberal Arts' Learning Communities. Before starting their freshman year, students choose a community in the Liberal Arts program that they want to be a part of. These communities all have different themes, ranging from exploring literature and society (LITTERAE), to considering how individuals and groups influence each other culturally (PERSONAE). The classes they take reflect these interests, which in turn are reinforced in residence hall activities.

### **Conclusion**

Repeatedly, we strive to offer an experience that not only educates the students and prepares them for a career, but also educates students' hearts and spirits. The employees who work here are an active part of this endeavor, which is an outgrowth of our mission statement. Being able to be a part of this process and helping to offer this education to students is something I love to do. This is that elusive 'something' that meant so much to me, that made working at Duquesne so enjoyable. I have seen it become the cornerstone of many students' lives. It can be a secret source of strength in whatever the future holds.

*...that elusive 'something'  
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## ***The Duquesne University Mission Statement***

Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit is a Catholic University, founded by members of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, the Spiritans, and sustained through a partnership of laity and religious. Duquesne serves God by serving students – through commitment to excellence in liberal and professional education, through profound concern for moral and spiritual values, through the maintenance of an ecumenical atmosphere open to diversity, and through service to the Church, the community, the nation, and the world.

