

The Presbyterian Outlook

Church-College Partnership Award

*"How my education at **Davis & Elkins College** has shaped my faith and equipped me for significant service and leadership."*

In January of 2010 I left Colombia, my home country, to start my college experience at Davis & Elkins College (D&E) thanks to a tennis scholarship, even though I really didn't know much about the school. Unlike many American students, I was not fortunate enough to tour or visit the campus. I decided to go to D&E thanks to the relationship I built through emails with my tennis coach and through my exploration of the college website.

My first semesters were great, although I had to adapt to a new place and culture, which made my experience a little more challenging. But people at D&E made it easy. Everyone was very friendly, welcoming, and respectful. After my first year I felt comfortable – I was able to be myself and explore what D&E had to offer. I also felt a sense of ownership and responsibility for our school, fostering my desire to help build a better place for all of us. So I joined Student Assembly, I took leadership roles in different organizations, and I became a Resident Assistant. Without fully understanding why, I found myself driven to get involved and go beyond the classroom and the tennis court.

And I believe all of these things were ultimately possible because we are family – D&E is a family. I saw it every day when students voiced their opinions and concerns knowing that they

would be listened to; when people attended sporting events and teams cheered on other teams; seeing people from different ethnic backgrounds and walks of life become best friends; being guided by extraordinary leaders and administrators who care deeply about our growth and development; and having professors who not only know your full name but, also, the details of who you are and what you want to become, demonstrating their genuine investment in our personal and intellectual growth in ways that one usually finds only among family members. Our sense of community allows us to continually feel that we are a part of something larger than ourselves.

Though people may think that we did not come to college to find a second family, the familial community that D&E offers us prepares and inspires us in unimaginable ways, leading us toward success and, equally importantly, toward thoughtful engagement in the world, just like our mission statement says.

This leads me to a second observation: D&E's education is excellent and I strongly believe in it. The liberal arts education D&E provides is like none other, molding us into more well-rounded and aware citizens. Nevertheless, the reason why I think D&E is such a great institution goes far beyond academics. I have always thought that it is crucial to possess balance in life, and I found balance by being guided in a beautiful spiritual journey with the help of our Chaplain Kevin Starcher. I was able to shape my faith and build a strong internal balance – I learned that love is the power that drives my life and it is the single, most important value that connects me with God.

Since arriving at D&E I had the privilege of contributing to the D&E community in many ways and I feel a sense of joy because the college that I chose, without really knowing it at the

time, was the right one for me, challenging me to become my best self. But this essay is not about me. It's about the wonderful internal relationship and connection that I experienced at D&E. It's about the D&E family and the education many other students, grateful like me, are receiving. I would like to reflect upon the intangible and immeasurable – our sense of community and love, one that fosters an environment of success and growth, and that Jesus definitely gave extreme importance to. I want the reader of this essay to take the time to be grateful and appreciate how blessed we all are for countless different reasons, and remember that the love we give away is the only love we keep.

Thank you!

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