

A CONVERSATION WITH HUGH COMER



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How did you first become connected to the Study Center (and the Darden Christian Fellowship)?

When my wife and I came to Darden, we moved in about a week before classes started and there was a flyer for a BBQ at someone's house. We went, immediately connected with several people and instantly had a community. Having other Darden spouses was great for my wife as she looked to build relationships in a new place.

With so many demands on your time, what has motivated you to stay involved with the Study Center after your time ended at UVA?

Before coming to Darden, I wrestled with the notion of vocational calling and the idea that there isn't a dichotomy between the sacred and secular. God calls people to a host of different places to serve him, including the secular workplace. It was in this spirit that I chose to pursue my MBA. I connected with [former Executive Director] Drew Trotter through Darden Christian Fellowship and he was really helpful in thinking through this concept of calling.

A decade or so after I left Darden, I began to return to Charlottesville to recruit for my company. I'd reach out to Drew and we'd meet up at the Cavalier Diner. During our visits, I learned about other Study Center ministries and got to know Bill when he transitioned in as Executive Director. As I came to appreciate the full impact the Study Center was having on Grounds—in addition to what I experienced at Darden—the more I felt called to support its ministry. It was just really exciting to see.

Seeing my daughter, who is now head of the Christian Study Center of Champaign-Urbana, is mind-boggling. It's amazing how the connection carried through from my time at Darden to her career now.

How did your time in Darden Christian Fellowship shape your outlook on your professional career?

The Study Center embodies two things really well. It is not only a welcoming community where people can form strong, lasting relationships but it also challenges you to think deeply about your Christian faith and how it relates to all of life. Those two notions do not compete against each other, but rather work together.

When I was at Darden, the community there was a haven. We could share frustrations and anxieties about our next steps in life and bounce questions off each other: “What does it mean to be a Christian and pursue investment banking?” “Could jobs in finance be legitimate, God-centered work?” We found a space to discuss how our work and faith could be integrated. Darden Christian Fellowship gave me a foundation for pursuing these questions.

I see more and more where the Study Center teaches students how to integrate their faith into their areas of study. Through Study Center activities, students are able to examine the Christian faith at the same level of depth and expertise that they get from their professors at UVA. And once you’re at Chancellor Street, you feel that community aspect as well. It gets students thinking about how to treat people as people, made in the image of God, rather than numbers or cogs. When I visit the Study Center, I see those values embodied at the house on Chancellor Street.

Graduate school can be a stressful time where overworking is common and it's difficult for students to prioritize rest or spiritual health. How do the Study Center's graduate ministries reach students so focused on worldly success?

It’s a time where it's easy to pursue the wrong things. The community of the graduate fellowships can serve as safety net to help people through such a stressful time. But again, it’s not a dichotomy between a secular school experience and a Christian fellowship on the side. DCF can actually provide thoughtful input and stimulate thinking about what students are learning inside the classroom.

I've the chance to visit a couple of the the DCF groups over the years and I often find these students asking, "How can I serve the Darden community?" Even broader than just serving the faculty and students, they're asking how they can serve the people in the cafeteria or the people who clean the rooms. That's a great example of bringing Christian faith into a place and not just looking at the Darden experience and trying to squeeze as much out of the two-year MBA as possible.

Through times of rest, fellowship, and studying Scripture, DCF brings students a sense of calm and peace and meets them where they are. It gives them a framework for how to live as a Christian for the rest of their lives.