Paul Fromson, professor of psychology, steps down this spring after serving five years as founding director of the Lumen Prize Program. The Lumen Prize, established in 2007, is the university’s premier award that comes with a $15,000 scholarship to support and celebrate students’ academic research and creative activity. Fromson spoke with President Leo M. Lambert about the progress of the program and his hopes for its future.

**PF:** What do you see as the major benefits of the Lumen Prize for Elon’s intellectual climate?

**LL:** The most obvious benefit is for that small group of winners who get significant financial and mentoring support. Beyond that, there are a bunch of interesting ripples. For those students who applied but didn’t emerge as winners, they have made significant jump-steps on their scholarly work. The Lumen Prize is becoming a benchmark for what’s possible in undergraduate research at the university. I’ve heard from some of the prize applicants that it was part of their decision to come to Elon.

**PF:** What are your thoughts on the Lumen Prize’s future as you pass the torch to Professor of Philosophy Ann Cahill?

**LL:** Even faculty who feel that their plates are very full, when they get one of these students in their office and they talk about their vision and their enthusiasm, you just succumb. You want to be a part of it. Nurturing and developing that spark over the course of a project is very stimulating. From the beginning of the Lumen Prize, we saw that it wasn’t a “two years and over” kind of notion. We capture these students at a particular point in their journey, but it’s a journey they started before they came to Elon and it’s one we very much want to see continue after they leave. These are students faculty will have an ongoing relationship with, and that’s very attractive.

**PF:** Why are faculty members invested in mentoring a Lumen Prize winner, and what benefits do they gain?

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**PF:** The Office of International Fellowships began at the same time as the Lumen Prize. How do the programs connect?

**PF:** Janet (Myers, associate professor of English and director of national and international fellowships) and I have been very intentional about coordinating what we do. We attend meetings with first-year students in Elon’s Honors Fellows program, encouraging them to think about all four years of their education and how the different pieces can fit together. For example, we ask them to think about problems they were interested in when they came to Elon, or those they discover in courses they take during their first year, and how those can become targets for independent scholarship. Our Lumen Prize winners receive additional resources that allow them to elevate their work so when they apply for major external awards – Goldwater and Fulbright scholarships, for example – they can be competitive with students at any institution in the country.

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**PF:** We are so grateful to you for your leadership in founding this program. What are your thoughts on the Lumen Prize’s future as you pass the torch to Professor of Philosophy Ann Cahill?

**PF:** First, I’d like to bring in more applicants but also do a better job recruiting first-generation university students. We need to do more outreach to let them know about the process. Second, we need to make sure we develop a network of Lumen alumni who will become mentors for current Elon students. That fits with the idea that the Lumen Prize is not just a two-year experience. Finally, I’d like to focus on faculty mentoring. Many faculty have been shy about taking on a Lumen student because they’re not sure what’s involved in it. I think Elon has great potential to become a leader in exploring and identifying best practices about how to mentor students in this kind of work.