Deep Service Leads to Stronger Communities and Nation

During the past two summers, I have had the honor of participating in two national summits planning the launch of the Franklin Project, an initiative of the Aspen Institute. The project is named for the great statesman Benjamin Franklin. Walter Isaacson, Franklin’s biographer, chief executive officer of the Aspen Institute and one of the great thinkers behind the Franklin Project, has noted that Franklin’s enormous civic contributions included the founding of myriad civic associations, including a volunteer fire department, library, hospital, insurance groups and a postal system.

Great social impact. 1 million young people could make on our country working in the fields of K-12 education, conservation and the environment, health and nutrition, veterans support, and many others. In addition to the great national benefits that would result from direct service, participants would develop invaluable “soft skills” that will serve them well in their future careers, including learning about leadership, working on teams, building resiliency and listening carefully to others. Most important of all, we could reignite a spirit and culture of national service that would strengthen our American democracy.

Community engagement remains one of the great defining hallmarks of an Elon education. Students, faculty, staff and alumni strive to promote service as a sustained commitment to communities, local and globally, and to our many community partners. For example, through the Leaders in Collaborative Service (LINC$s) program of the Kernodle Center for Service Learning and Community Engagement, Elon has formed long-term partnerships with eight community agencies: Cummings High School, the homeless shelter and food bank of Allied Churches of Alamance County, Boys & Girls Club, Burlington Housing Authority, Family Abuse Services, Kopper Top Life Learning Center (horse care and riding lessons for people with disabilities), Positive Attitude Youth Center (after-school tutoring and recreation) and the Salvation Army food pantry.

LINC$s student coordinators recruit, coordinate and guide volunteers who provide invaluable direct services; many of these students are engaged in one or more of the 57 academic courses at Elon that incorporate service learning as an integral part of the course content, seamlessly connecting knowledge with community engagement—a truly

The Franklin Project is an all-too-rare example in contemporary American life in which people from all walks of life—military, philanthropy, education, politics, business and nonprofit sectors—have come together in support of a big idea: to create 1 million opportunities for young people to serve their country through a service year experience. Led by retired Gen. Stanley McChrystal, former commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, the Franklin Project aspires to democratize the meaning of service—to uphold both military and civilian service as two sides of the same coin.

Many great models of civilian service already exist, including AmeriCorps, City Year and Teach for America, but these fine programs accept only a small fraction of qualified applicants. Imagine the

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powerful pedagogy. Last year 972 students provided 34,047 hours of service through academic service learning courses. And during Elon’s 125th anniversary year, our community surpassed the goal of 125,000 hours of service contributed by 3,136 students.

Another great example of fostering an ethic of deep service is the Periclean Scholars Program, directed by Professor Tom Arcaro. Founded in 2001 as a part of the Eugene Lang Foundation’s national Project Pericles consortium of colleges and universities committed to developing students’ commitment to social responsibility, Elon Periclean Scholars commit to a three-year project, making an impact on such problems as HIV/AIDS in Namibia and malnutrition in Honduras. I have been impressed that Periclean Scholars’ experiences have been among the most profound of their undergraduate years at Elon.

Of course a committed faculty and staff foster the Elon spirit of service and center it in the academic heart of the university. Assistant Dean Mary Morrison of the Kernodle Center is a leading professional nationally who is committed to helping students gain greater meaning from their academic experiences through service. And faculty members such as Associate Professor of Psychology Alexa Darby, winner of the 2014 Periclean Award for Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility for her work with disadvantaged schools in Alamance County, have been leaders in helping their colleagues infuse service learning experiences across the university. The experiences they create for their students are eye-opening, transformative and life-changing.

Given all of the above, it should come as no surprise that Elon is a leading producer of Peace Corp volunteers, Teach for America educators and Fulbright Scholars. We are proud our alumni remain committed to continued public service, living out this cherished Elon ethos in thousands of meaningful ways. I look forward to the great ideals of the Franklin Project being realized and am confident Elon University will have many alumni attracted to the concept of national service, yet another tangible expression of my deeply held conviction that the world needs Elon graduates.

Leo M. Lambert
President

ELON CONFERS HONORARY DEGREES

Three longtime Elon supporters received honorary degrees during Commencement week. Ed and Joan Doherty P’07, whose gifts to Elon have advanced the university’s national reputation for its entrepreneurship education, received honorary Doctor of Business degrees May 23 at Elon’s Master of Business Administration graduation ceremony. The couple, who operate a chain of family restaurants, were instrumental in establishing the Doherty Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership in the Love School of Business in 2007 and have hosted several “Evening for Elon” events in New York. Ed was elected to the Elon Board of Trustees in 2006.

Gail McMichael Lane was presented with an honorary Doctor of Laws degree at Elon Law’s May 24 graduation in recognition of her commitment and service to Elon. Lane is the director of the McMichael Family Foundation and has served and led Elon’s board of trustees for more than 20 years. She has been a guiding force for the foundation’s support of the university, including the largest endowment gift to Elon Law, which supports three scholarships.

Jo Watts Williams ’55 receives top North Carolina honor

Elon University Vice President Emerita Jo Watts Williams ’55 was awarded the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, North Carolina’s top honor for service to the state and community. Republican State Sen. Rick Gunn of Alamance County and Elon University President Leo M. Lambert presented her with the award on May 30 during Elon’s Staff Appreciation Day.

Williams joined the Elon faculty in 1969 and in 1979 became vice president of development. She retired in 1995 and was named special assistant to the president. She was named Elon’s Distinguished Alumna of the Year in 1995 and in 1998 earned the Elon Medallion for outstanding service to the university.