Dear Elon Students:

There has been much discussion recently on college campuses across the nation about the Web site JuicyCampus.com. This website encourages students to “spill the juice,” with total anonymity promised to the user. Prompts on the site elicit derogatory and humiliating comments about students, faculty and staff, again with the writer taking no responsibility for his or her writings. Many of these comments are malicious and untrue, and have been harmful to the character and esteem of many students, faculty, staff and student organizations.

JuicyCampus is not a new phenomenon. It was launched in August 2007 and includes message boards for 500 campuses. Elon was added to JuicyCampus less than a month ago, and has been much talked about in the student body. Colleagues on other campuses advise that the novelty of this site will soon wear off and students will stop using it. But JuicyCampus raises important issues about which I feel compelled to comment.

Elon values freedom of expression and the exchange of ideas as fundamental to the learning process and a vibrant intellectual campus climate. At the same time, we espouse the principles of civility and personal responsibility in our interactions with each other. The Elon Honor Code http://www.elon.edu/eweb/students/handbook/honorcpp.xhtml speaks directly to the values of honesty, integrity, responsibility and respect as essential principles for a healthy academic community. Likewise, the University Committee on Technology, Ethics and Responsibility emphasizes the “shared community value” of civility in the use of technology, warning that people may mistakenly assume a sense of detachment while communicating electronically and forget the impact their communications may have on others. The committee established the guideline that “Nothing should be communicated electronically that would not be said face to face.”

Freedom of expression and civility are not antithetical values. In fact they go hand in hand in our community. While one may express an idea freely, it is unethical to knowingly lie about another person or spread false, unsubstantiated rumors. And while we may not agree with each other’s expressions, we must take responsibility for what we say and do. Posting malicious rumors anonymously on a Web site is inconsistent with these ideals and with showing respect for the dignity of all members of our community.

Some students have asked if the university will block JuicyCampus from its network. But to do so would set a precarious precedent for censorship and would run counter to the principle of freedom of expression. Once censoring sites began, it would be hard to know which sites to block or not block. On a practical level, blocking this site would also not prevent anyone from accessing it from outside the Elon network. Instead of censoring this site, we call on the good judgment and good will of those in the Elon community to follow the honor code and uphold the community values of respect, responsibility, honesty, and integrity in our words and actions, including in the use of technology both on and off the campus. In this way we call upon the best within ourselves and in our interactions and communications with each other.

Sincerely,

Smith Jackson
Vice President for Student life
and Dean of Students

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1. "Online Campus Gossips Won't Show Their Faces,"