Building a Vibrant Alumni Network

Initiatives in support of the Elon Commitment strategic plan theme #6:
Developing innovative alumni programs to advance and support the Elon graduate

Background

To meet the goals of the Elon Commitment strategic plan, our community must develop an alumni network that is vital to the advancement of the university. This requires providing alumni leaders a significant stake in ownership of their alma mater as architects and implementers. For three decades, admissions has been the responsibility of everyone on Elon’s campus. Now is the time to make an equal commitment toward the engagement of alumni.

Elon currently has established programs that engage alumni in meaningful ways. There are 13 regional chapters, more than 2,200 alumni take part in programs annually, and many alumni return to campus throughout the year for events and activities.

However, financial support of the university by alumni is on a downward trend. In 2009-10, about 16 percent of alumni made donations, an annual participation level that has been dropping as Elon graduates larger and larger classes.

Listening and Learning

Over the past 18 months, Elon's advancement staff members have spent a great deal of time listening to the many members of our community who care deeply about alumni engagement, and reviewing best practices from our peer and aspirant programs.

Those conversations suggest that Elon must provide greater support to more directly engage alumni in the life of the university, coordinating the efforts to maximize their effectiveness. With a clear vision from campus leadership and wise alumni leaders, we propose the following priorities:

- Expand the Elon alumni volunteer network
- Prepare current students to be Elon alumni
- Celebrate the accomplishments of Elon alumni
- Bring alumni back to campus
- Expand alumni regional outreach
EXPAND THE ELON ALUMNI VOLUNTEER NETWORK

Alumni volunteers have stronger connections to Elon and act as champions to encourage involvement by other alumni. Model programs such as those at Davidson, Washington University, Williams and Dartmouth successfully engage alumni volunteers through peer-to-peer outreach.

In expanding Elon's alumni volunteer network, we will achieve the following goals:

**Triple the number of alumni volunteers by 2014 (from 250 to 750)**

- **Advisory Boards** – 200 alumni volunteers will be engaged as they serve on the university's advisory boards including athletics, schools, graduate programs, departments and alumni leadership.

- **Alumni Career Contacts** – 150 alumni volunteers will support the student professional development centers and internship programs, coordinated by the Student Professional Development Center and employer relations staff.

- **Alumni Regional Leaders** – 85 alumni volunteers will lead regional activities and serve as contacts for alumni in their regions.

- **Alumni Class and Affinity Connectors** – 315 alumni volunteers will support annual programming and fundraising efforts with a focus on their class and other affinities.

This vibrant alumni network of volunteers will require new training, staff support and University resources. Volunteers will have clear job descriptions, expectations for participation and giving, trainings that include in-depth orientations, volunteer-centered websites with procedural manuals and support materials, regular volunteer conference calls and webinars, and recognition systems to properly acknowledge the important work of our alumni volunteers. Staff members will support volunteer groups to successfully implement annual plans and a volunteer leadership summit will be created for spring 2012. Special emphasis and training will be provided to staff around the focus of increasing the diversity of our boards and councils.

**Increase alumni giving participation to 30 percent by 2014**

Like many other successful universities, Elon will develop alumni peer-to-peer solicitation efforts with a focus on alumni classes and affinity. Volunteers will be carefully selected to ensure overall coverage by engaging alumni from approximately every third graduating class year. Ideally, we will have alumni from each class year and from each major affinity group serving as volunteers.
Grow alumni employment information in our database by 10 percent annually

Elon will use its technological resources (Raiser’s Edge & Harris Connect) to more effectively manage data, develop richer profiles and communicate with alumni. The university will also enhance its information collection systems (Magazine of Elon, Web site, faculty/staff, student experiences, social media, etc.).

Utilizing social media will be a significant component of alumni engagement. By working closely with others on campus utilizing social media and our alumni engagement staff (all who use this technology daily), we will make connections to and between alumni.

PREPARE CURRENT STUDENTS TO BE ELON ALUMNI

A top priority of this plan is to educate current students about their lifelong relationship with Elon. With the support of the Student Alumni Council, formed in the fall of 2010, the university will expand outreach to the student body, developing a four-year approach that incorporates programming, communication and fundraising activities.

Every Elon graduate should understand the three pillars of a successful Elon alumnus:

Be a Lifelong PARTNER: stays connected, informed and involved.
Be a Lifelong ADVOCATE: engages others, recruits prospective students and expands Elon’s professional network
Be a Lifelong INVESTOR: gives annually, supports priorities, and invests in students

Enhancing senior class programming will be critical, but equally important are the opportunities to educate and cultivate each class year at Elon. We will develop a four-year program based on the following model:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Year</th>
<th>• Orientation, Elon 101, New Student Convocation, Summer Welcome events, homecoming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>• Alumni visiting classes and student organizations, convocations, homecoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>• Alumni visiting classes, Internships with alumni, homecoming, Elon 401, convocations, Destination Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>• Senior class meeting, senior class giving effort, senior seminars, commencement, career contacts, welcome to the city events, homecoming</td>
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CELEBRATE THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF ELON ALUMNI

President Leo M. Lambert observes that Elon’s success “will be told through the success stories of Elon alumni.” As part of the plan to build a vibrant alumni network, the university will find new and expanded ways to recognize alumni. Among the goals are the following:

**Expand the number of alumni awards from 7 to 30 by 2014**

Elon has long-standing awards presented to alumni annually as part of Homecoming: Distinguished Alumnus, Distinguished Alumna, Young Alumnus, Young Alumna, Alumni Service, Distinguished Service to Elon and Service to Church and Society awards. The Department of Physical Therapy annually recognizes a DPT graduate and the Top 10 under 10 program which recognizes young alumni. Through this plan, Elon's academic and student life programs will create additional alumni awards that provide opportunities to invite successful alumni back to campus for recognition. The goal is to intentionally increase the number of alumni awards to 30 by 2014.

**Collect and share 100 alumni success stories annually**

Through an interactive service on the alumni website, all members of the Elon community will be encouraged to submit information about alumni successes/stories. This information will be validated and then incorporated into their official records and communicated through appropriate channels to ensure celebration and recognition (Speeches, E-net, Magazine of Elon, nominations, digital displays on campus, the Elon website, etc.).

**BRING ALUMNI BACK TO CAMPUS**

Bringing alumni back to campus is an essential strategy of this plan. By inviting alumni to speak with classes or student groups, we provide an important educational resource to students and validate the education and life successes of our graduates. The goal of this plan is increase the number of alumni who make personal visits to campus:

**Invite and host 50 alumni guest speakers annually**

Working collaboratively with the university’s five academic Deans, Elon will implement an alumni guest speaker program, bringing successful alumni into classrooms to share their experiences and offer advice based on their careers. This program will help students understand the importance of staying connected with Elon following graduation. It will also provide real-world insights for students who are planning their lives after Elon. These types of interactions tie directly to the new student professional development plans and can open doors for students in search of internship and career opportunities.
Increase alumni participation in Homecoming by 15% each year

Elon will dramatically expand Homecoming, beginning in 2011 with more significant growth in 2012. Homecoming will become a more collaborative effort, with stronger ties to Student Life, schools, academic departments, athletics, and other programs. Reunions and affinity programs will play a larger leadership role and support the overall efforts of the Alumni Homecoming Committee by engaging connectors within each class and affinity to reach out to other alumni for engagement. New uses of technology will better capture those alumni that return to campus who are not registered.

Host 150 alumni families annually

Starting in fall 2012, Elon will create an Alumni Visit Program that is similar to the Admissions Welcome events. The program will focus on bringing alumni with families back to campus, incorporating fun activities while allowing alumni to re-connect with Elon.

EXPAND ALUMNI REGIONAL OUTREACH

Elon will continue to strengthen its existing regional chapter program, engaging alumni where they live. The goals include the following:

Expand Regional Chapters from 13 to 20 by 2014

Elon’s network of alumni chapters is one of our best successes to-date. Currently, there are 13 chapters, primarily on the East Coast, along with chapters in Chicago and Los Angeles. These chapters engage alumni in social gatherings, sports-related events, cultural activities, community service, career programming, social and professional networking, lifelong learning and fundraising events.

Expanded programs will consider the “age and stage” of alumni, fitting the needs and interests of people of all ages. Alumni regional volunteers will serve as the point of contact for those moving to particular cities, a model that has worked well for such universities as Harvard and Duke.

Double the number of outreach events by 2014

Elon will expand its successful Evenings for Elon events, visiting more communities and involving more faculty and staff members. Currently, Evenings for Elon are held in 3-5 communities each semester, allowing alumni and parents to network with one another and hear an update from President Lambert about campus news and plans. Future Evenings for Elon will engage the provost, deans, vice presidents, coaches, and other faculty and staff leaders. New sites will be added, particularly in areas where Elon has not had any outreach. Additionally, planning will incorporate visits to Elon’s traditional major metropolitan markets on a consistent basis, possibly every 18 months.