

Speech given by Elon senior Kacey Platky during a Spring '04 Admissions Weekend

Good morning everyone, my name is Kacey Platky and I'm a senior here at Elon. I'm a biology major with minors in both human services and psychology and am hoping to have a career in genetic counseling some point in the near future. I'm from Takoma Park, Maryland, which is right outside DC and am planning on heading back up north after graduation in just a few months!

Elon is a place where it is easy to get involved in lots of different activities. I'm an Elon Ambassador, a sister of Alpha Chi Omega sorority, and a staff member of Elon Volunteers! Through EV! I have been involved with Kopper Top, a therapeutic horse-back riding program, on many different levels, from an academic service learning participant all the way through to my current position as coordinator of the program.

I began my work with Kopper Top as a requirement of my introduction to human services class. We were all required to do 40 hours, which I honestly wasn't thrilled about. But I saw that Kopper Top was one of the choices available, and since I have been riding for a long time and enjoy working with animals and people, I thought that might be the best place for me to volunteer. Four years later, I am still there.

Working at Kopper Top has really helped me to gain a lot of perspective and to appreciate what goes on outside of Elon. I now have a stake in the community that extends beyond just the university. I have a friend and supporter in Deborah, the woman who owns and runs the facility. Kopper Top has made me realize that despite my love of science, I also love being around people and those aspects of the helping professions, which has started me down the road to genetic counseling.

Since my first experience with Kopper Top as an academic service learning class I have been able to use the facility as both an escape from the hectic life of a college student and as a place to apply what I've learned in my classes. One little boy named Ryan provides a good example of this integration. Ryan and I started going to Kopper Top around the same time, so we have both grown up in the program. He's a wonderful kid, but he has a lot of medical problems. He doesn't walk or talk or eat normally, he is fed through a stomach tube. I feel like being a biology major has really helped me related to that aspect of Ryan's life and helped me tailor my interactions with him to maximize the benefits that he gets from riding.

Ryan's mom accompanies him to his lessons, and interacting with her has been a great way for me to see certain counseling techniques in action. We talked recently in one of my human services classes about the systems approach to counseling, where you work on strengthening other connections in your life when some are strained. I can see Kopper Top as an excellent support for his mom because it allows her to hand over her responsibilities for a while, and just be a regular mom. I think when you integrate classes and concepts like I've been able to do at Kopper Top you're able to generate a better experience for everyone involved – even the horses!

I also have a good relationship with Kathy and all of the other EV! staff members. I know that if I ever needed anything, from a recommendation for grad school to just someone to vent to, that someone in that office would be happy help me out. I still smile and chat with Tommy Gumm, my intro to human services professor, who I haven't had a class with in three years but still remembers my name.

Being involved in EV! and Kopper Top has rounded out my Elon experience. I am not just another college student on this campus. I am engaged in both the school and the larger community, which is what I think the goal of college is – to help you become a person who cares about and is involved in things larger than just yourself. Kathy and Professor Gumm and everyone at Kopper Top have helped me to become the person I am today, and have helped me make my Elon experience a great success. Thank you.