As we begin making preparations to celebrate Elon’s 125th anniversary next year, it is fitting that a central element of the Elon Commitment strategic plan calls for a reimagining of our relationship with our alumni body. For the past two years, under the leadership of Elon Alumni Board president John Hill ’76, past president Chris Martin ’78 and president-elect Julia Strange Chase ’84, the board, along with senior university leadership, has been considering how to create one of the most robust, involved, committed and active alumni bases in the nation. For Elon, this is an especially complex task. Our alumni base is extraordinarily young, with nearly 60 percent of alumni in their 20s and 30s, very much involved in the early stages of their careers and beginning families. We often hear from graduates of earlier decades that the campus has changed so much, especially in the physical evolution of its 620-acre grounds and facilities. And yet, we hear powerfully and unequivocally that what is most important about Elon – the human transformation that takes place here, the close relationships between faculty and students, the extraordinary sense of community – has been constant for every decade of alumni with which I have been personally acquainted, from the 1920s to present day.

We have decided to take a number of concrete steps toward our goal of building a vibrant alumni network. The plan will be guided by John Barnhill ’92, assistant vice president for university advancement, and includes the following initiatives: 

» The Elon Alumni Board has commissioned Max Cantor ’09 and Tim Johnson ’10, creators of the highly successful new Elon admissions video (it’s hard to watch without a tear coming to your eye!), to produce a video about the Elon alumni experience, due for release in early 2013.

» We plan to establish an alumni welcome center on main campus, a place that will be open year-round and staffed to offer tours, information and opportunities for alumni to reengage with their alma mater.

» We plan to add to our alumni engagement staff. Following the model of admissions officers’ relationships with prospective students, we plan to add alumni engagement staff over the next several years to develop reconnections to Elon.

» We plan to reestablish the summer class reunion experience and envision other types of conferences on campus designed specifically for alumni, especially those that involve connections with treasured faculty and staff.

» Most important of all, we want to encourage substantive engagement opportunities for alumni, especially in connection with the academic deans, faculty and staff. The deans have already begun to establish alumni awards programs within the schools and colleges of Elon to recognize important achievements of distinguished alumni and bring them back to campus. In the age of Skype, it is easy to invite an alum from afar to guest lecture in a class. Alumni also serve as mentors and internship hosts to current students. So many opportunities are possible to engage with Elon and be connected to the student experience on campus.

Why are alumni so important to the Elon Commitment strategic plan and to the future of the university? Great universities have great alumni networks. It is that simple. And, as I often tell students, Elon’s next great leap in reputation will not be based on new buildings or programs or rankings, but rather in very large measure upon the accomplishments of its alumni. For instance, Stephanie Newbold ’01 serves in the prestigious Supreme Court Fellows Program, learning firsthand the dynamics of the federal judiciary. In September, Matt Belanger ’05 won his third Emmy Award for news reporting and Mitch Pittman ’09 won his second Emmy. These are just a few of the many examples of alumni bringing pride to their university and helping to extend Elon’s national reach. I couldn’t be more proud.

Leo M. Lambert
President

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