MIND THE GAP

When I greeted new students at Opening Convocation Under the Oaks at the start of the year, 15 members of the Class of 2017 were absent. These students’ semester had already begun 2,000 miles away as part of the Elon Gap Semester Program, an innovative alternative way to begin university studies.

Now in its second year, the program has three distinctive phases: 1) a three-and-a-half week leadership and wilderness experience at the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS); 2) a series of four service experiences at a Native American reservation in South Dakota, a nonprofit dedicated to providing fresh food to inner-city residents of St. Louis, Mo.; an opportunity to study Appalachian culture and the impacts of the coal mining industry in southeastern Kentucky; and a Washington, D.C., experience focusing on the systemic issue of homelessness; and 3) a six-week study abroad experience in Costa Rica, which includes a home stay with a local family and study at the Elon Center in San Jose.

I was delighted to catch up with these adventurous members of the Class of 2017, along with program director Steve Morrison and Professor Phil Miller of the human service studies department at Elon, for two days in mid-September at the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Having just arrived at RE-MEMBER, a nonprofit dedicated to cultural understanding and improving life on the Oglala Lakota reservation, the students were thrilled to find the bunk beds in our cabin following their three weeks of wilderness camping.

The rates of unemployment, teen suicide and alcoholism at Pine Ridge, combined with poor living conditions for many and lack of ready access to healthy food, made an indelible impression on us all. On a service day at a local school, clearly an anchor institution within the community, we were impressed by capable and dedicated teachers and school counselors at work. After-dinner lectures by tribal elders amplified both pride of the Lakota in their great heritage and the systemic challenges of life on the reservation. Time in the cabin before bedtime gave students an opportunity to discuss what they
had witnessed that day, as well as to work on journals and reflection papers.

When I returned to campus, I interviewed three members of the Class of 2016—Cat Hollister, Corey Shegda and Dan Zangmeister—who participated in the inaugural year of the Gap Semester, and asked them to reflect on their experiences. Here are some of their thoughts.

**COREY:** I’m an Elon tour guide, and I recommend the program to every student I meet. I loved it. It was the best experience of my life.

**CAT:** NOLS affirmed for me a broad perspective of my place in the world. I realize how small each of us is in the larger world, yet that you can still have influence on the world around you. … You realize your experience can still be rich living with simplicity.

**DAN:** I learned tolerance of adversity and uncertainty, and being OK at facing challenging conditions and learning how not to freak out.

Corey, Cat and Dan told me stories about feeling like an outsider for the first time in their lives, of learning to depend on each other every day, of strong bonds and a special and lasting closeness of the group, of being pushed to their limits, of gaining perspective on what real challenge is all about, of getting to know people without the distractions of texting and technology, and of immersion in a new culture and language.

Certainly the program is not for everyone. Corey cautioned that students must be willing to adapt to new surroundings and unplug from cellphones. And students who are not interested in serving others aren’t appropriate for Gap.

My belief is that the Gap Semester Program is tailor-made for a young person seeking perspective, wanting time to reflect on their place in the world before beginning a traditional university semester, committed to exploring life outside often relatively privileged communities, seeking deep bonds with 14 soon-to-be-lifelong friends and testing their limits in the most constructive ways. I predict the overall Elon educations of Gap Semester graduates will be immeasurably enriched by their non-traditional start. They will have a jumpstart on what it means to think like a global citizen.

Leo M. Lambert
President

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### Howard, Pace and Klopman receive Elon Medallions

On Aug. 19, retired Elon University professors James “Jim” Pace and Judith Howard, along with retired vice president Susan Klopman, received Elon Medallions, the highest honor the university bestows on individuals for meritorious service to the institution.

Pace joined Elon’s Department of Religion in 1973. For the next 37 years, he taught courses such as Archeology of Palestine, Introduction to the Old Testament, Biblical Hebrew and Hebrew Prophets, and led Winter Term and semester study abroad programs in London and Italy. He regularly participated in archaeological digs in the Middle East and was devoted to his work with the Karak Resources Project, which brought together teams of archaeologists to excavate sites at an ancient fortress in Karak, Jordan, which he called his “home away from home.” Pace served multiple terms as chair of the department and received the Daniels-Danieley Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1987.

Throughout her 18 years at Elon, Howard served as a professor of education, director of the Master of Education program, department chair and interim dean of the School of Education. She also taught 24 different courses, used a $1 million federal grant to produce a series of problem-based K-12 curriculum units that integrated technology in the classroom and conducted research exploring how to implement those units in settings with exceptional learners. She was named director of Elon’s M.Ed. program in 1998 and led major initiatives to enhance academic quality and expand the program, including the current summer cohort system for elementary and special education programs. She received the School of Education’s Excellence in Teaching Award in 2004 and the Excellence in Service Award in 2010.

Klopman served Elon for 27 years in a variety of leadership roles. She began her career at Elon in 1985 as assistant director in the Department of Publications and Public Relations, now the Office of University Communications. She moved to Elon’s development office as director of foundation relations and prospect research and, in 1993, became assistant to President Fred Young and the Board of Trustees. She joined the admissions office in 1997 as assistant dean, was named dean of admissions in 2000 and vice president for admissions and financial planning in 2006. Klopman led the change from rolling admissions to deadline admissions, expanded international student recruitment and graduate admissions operations, and helped develop the Fellows programs, the Watson and Odyssey Scholars Program and the Elon Engagement scholarships.