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Safe Rides kicks volunteer
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Elon study abroad students experience 're-entry shock'

Leanne Jernigan
Reporter

Elon has always encouraged students to reach out of their "bubble" and explore new things. One way students achieve this is by studying abroad.

Students return after a semester in a different country with a much different outlook on life at Elon, as well as life in the United States. Those who were abroad fall semester have recently returned to the "Elon Bubble" for Winter Term and spring semester. Upon their arrival they experienced a sort of re-entry shock.

Some found it strange re-adjusting to life back at an American college. Little things such as makeup and cars seemed out of place, while attending class every day seemed foreign after being accustomed to taking classes at their own pace.

Some universities around the country offer programs that help students who are returning to the states with "reverse culture shock." Elon does not offer students the chance to receive help or advice on adjusting back to regular life. But is a program in which students have to learn how to re-adjust to a normal life really necessary after studying abroad?

Junior Valentine Woods was part of the Denmark International Study



Photo Submitted

Laura Bartholomay takes a break from her study abroad classes in Sweden to visit the mountainous regions of Norway. Her class schedule allowed for frequent trips to other countries, a convenience not necessarily afforded at Elon.

Program where she studied medical practice and policy programs in Copenhagen, Denmark.

"There is definitely a culture shock when you come home, but I'm not sure that it's anything a class could help with," she said.

Junior Laura Bartholomay spent fall semester in Orebro, Sweden. The only advice she received about

re-adjusting to life was a packet that explained the "emotional roller-coaster" when preparing to leave. The packet contained information on the highs and lows when abroad while touching a little on re-entry shock.

"The hardest part is feeling out of the loop with things like current songs and movies. Also, I have to

keep reminding myself that life went on here without me," she said.

Students who studied abroad and returned for Winter Term say they still do not feel as if they have returned to a real college atmosphere. With Winter Term having a more laid-back environment than a regular semester, returning students did not feel in the normal grind of Elon life.

When she returned for Winter Term, Bartholomay said she felt as if she had to wait a while for the "real Elon" to actually start.

Since Winter Term consists of only one class, returning students are just now feeling the pressure of 16-to-18-hour class weeks. While in Sweden, Bartholomay took self-study courses where she was in class for a brief time each week.

Besides the adjustment to schoolwork, Woods touched on other cultural differences she noticed.

"What has always been normal suddenly seems strange," she said.

She had to become readjusted to using a car for transportation as opposed to taking a train like she did in Denmark. Also, she was surprised when she noticed how many Elon girls wear full makeup everywhere around campus, whereas Denmark's women believe in natural beauty. Feeling like an observer

in a world that she used to feel a part of, Woods started noticing the little things.

One of the purposes of studying abroad is to allow students to view the world through a different perspective. That is the exciting part — experiencing new things and returning with a new sense of everything. Though students who have spent time abroad find it hard to reacclimate themselves to life in the United States, they doubted a program designed to help with re-entry would be effective.

"I personally don't think it would do any good. It's more like you're personally changed and I don't think there's anything they could have done or said to help. It's more processing everything on your own," Bartholomay said.

Woods proposed a different sort of program.

"I think it might be nice if there was a time for all the students who were gone to just get together and talk about their experiences both abroad and returning. Sometimes just knowing someone else understands what you're going through is all the help you need," Woods said.

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Students 'live their dream' as firefighters for Town of Elon

Jason Spinos
Reporter

Several Elon students are getting to live their childhood dream. A group of seven students are volunteer firefighters with the Elon Fire Department.

"I've been interested ever since I was a kid," said junior Scott Muthersbaugh, who participates in the program.

Freshman Timothy Anderson agreed.

"I've wanted to be a firefighter my whole life," he said. He first became a volunteer firefighter two years ago in his home state of Pennsylvania. When it was time for Anderson to

apply for colleges, he narrowed his choices by eliminating schools without a fire station nearby.

After deciding to apply to be a volunteer firefighter, the Elon students had to go through several steps before being accepted.

The fire station only accepts applications when there are openings for volunteers. A thorough background check of the applicants is conducted and the applicants are put through a number of interviews.

The applicants also have to go through a 90-day probation packet before they can respond to emergencies. During this time, they learn the basics of firefighting and the equipment they will use. However, the volunteers do not learn

everything they will need to know in these 90 days.

"It takes a full year to get up to par," said Assistant Fire Chief Alva Sizmore.

Once accepted as firefighters, they will be on call 24 hours a day. They can turn off their pagers, but they need to answer a certain percentage of calls each year. And volunteers don't just get the easy jobs.

"We do everything, once we are trained for it," Anderson said.

In addition to the initial 90-day training period, the fire station holds training classes two nights a month. The volunteers and other members are required to attend 54 hours of

training a year.

With such a difficult application process, all that training and the inherent dangers of the job, why do these Elon students want to volunteer?

Anderson and Muthersbaugh both said they love their job, and they agreed on the best things about being a volunteer firefighter: the strong impact firefighters make and the family-type atmosphere of the fire station.

"It gets in their blood once they start doing it," Sizmore said. "It's a gift, and they enjoy doing it."

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