

Non-traditional students add experience to class

Enrollment of older students has tripled in past 10 years

By Deborah Durkee
JC 225

They can be seen on campus, dressed a bit differently, hair a tad gray. They don't always mingle with the students and they don't belong with the teachers. Who are these outsiders with serious looks carrying books?

The Registrar's Office calls them "non-traditional" students, any student age 25 and over. In 1978 they numbered one of every 17 students at Elon, by 1988 they numbered one of nine. Why the increase in older students?

There is a nationwide increase in college enrollment even with the decrease in students graduating from high school. According to Registrar Mark Albertson, reasons for that enrollment increase include the facts that a larger percentage of high school graduates go on to college and many of the larger colleges have openly recruited non-traditional students.

Small classes

Recruiting, however, is not the answer for Elon's non-traditional student increase. "Elon has not gone out of its way to recruit non-traditional students," says Albertson. "The addition of two masters programs has helped the enrollment." Additionally, he cites the small size of the school as an element which attracts older students.

Non-traditional student Peggy White agrees. When she raises her hand in class at Elon, Peggy knows the teacher will answer her question. If she were attending UNC, she feels her hand would be raised alongside 200 others. Size is the reason Peggy has stayed at Elon.

Teachers seem to be glad the non-traditional students have stayed at Elon. Pam Kiser, Assistant Professor of Human Services, is very enthusiastic about non-traditional students. She sees them as the model of a serious student. She feels it is valuable to the traditional student to have that model.

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Pam Kiser

Role models

"The mature student can somehow anchor a whole class," says Kiser. She feels that one enthusiastic person can motivate a class because that enthusiasm is contagious.

Non-traditional students can be a bridge between the faculty member and the traditional students. "They are a resource to the students, reliable people to go to when they need help in the course," says Kiser. "Non-traditional students can become caretakers of other students." Kiser calls them "quasi-parental figures."

One of Kiser's 19-year-old students indicated to her that she felt broadened by her exposure to older people in a classroom situation. The non-traditional students bring life experience with them to the classroom.

Another plus Kiser sees from non-traditional students is on a personal level: "As I've gotten older, it's nice to have some students that I can truly relate to as peers." When a friendship develops, Kiser feels that it is "a unique reward of working with that student."

Reasons vary

Reasons for attending college later in life vary by student, but have a general theme: self-improvement.

Tom Moore, a 29-year-old computer programmer, puts it this way: "I didn't feel like I was getting the best job. I lost consideration for other jobs because I didn't have a degree."

Glenda Walden, a 41-year-old mother, had done a lot of volunteer work while her daughter, Jennifer, was little. In order to get "paid work," she started college when Jennifer started kindergarten.



Photo by Pat Hoblin

Becky Bowling, one of several non-traditional students currently attending Elon, sits in class with Al Riddick.

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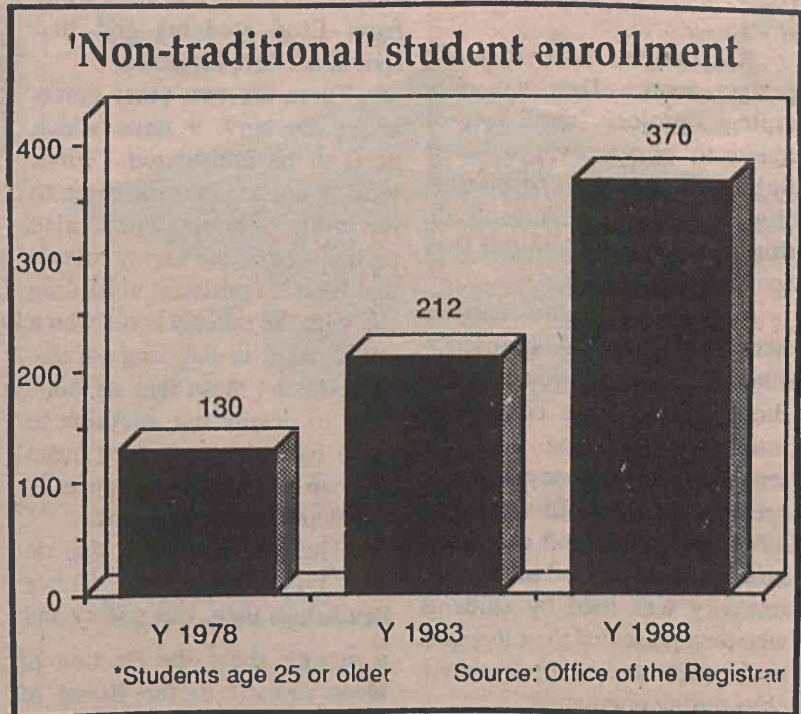
Brenda Paige, a 33-year-old senior, was too arrogant about education after high school. She always had the goal in mind to complete her education, but she got sidetracked when she injured her knee. After years of surgery, recuperation, and working to pay off the surgery, she is glad to have the opportunity to go back to school. "It means so much more," she says.

Juggling act

Juggling family responsibilities, work responsibilities, study time and fun time is the main difficulty of the non-traditional student.

A 47-year-old mother of five, Peggy White is a senior majoring in economics. With three children still at home, her family responsibilities have her calling out spelling words while she's peeling the potatoes.

In addition to the juggling act, Peggy and her husband have the financial drain of a daughter



in college. Peggy takes nine hours at Elon because that is all she can afford and juggle.

How is Peggy coping with it all? "There are no secrets, you just blunder through," she says. "Quiet time with the Lord in the morning gives me extra zip." She also has a supportive family, which is a big help.

Support group

Peggy is a member of ReNew, a campus support group for non-traditional students. ReNew provides a way for non-

traditional students to meet and share common problems. Because they live off campus, finding out what is happening on the campus can be a problem for these students. ReNew helps to fill that gap.

The group tries to meet monthly, but because of the schedule demands of non-traditional students, they are considering a newsletter for the busiest months.

The Academic Advising Center can be contacted for more information on ReNew.