

# Looking back: The life lessons I learned while at Elon

**Jessica Vitak**  
Managing Editor

Well, I hope they are not the four best years of my life, but I think my four years at Elon will always remain some of the interesting and life-changing times. Of course, for me, having co-ed classes was a big step after attending an all-girls Catholic high school. But I don't think there is one person out there who, after going through the first years of adulthood, cannot say their life is somehow different after college.

Through all of the friendships, opportunities and experiences I have had at Elon, I think I have learned few important life lessons. I think each of these lessons have helped make me who I am today and allowed me to emerge from college a stronger, more confident person unafraid of the challenges I may encounter in the future. Below are what I believe are some of the most important things I have learned.

**1** *Don't sweat the small stuff.* This may be the hardest lesson for anyone to learn. Being able to forgive,

to not hold grudges and avoid petty arguments may seem like an easy feat, but I have seen many friendships and relationships fall apart because of it. Rather than focus on every little detail of life, realize it is a journey of many years, many people and many adventures. But because we only live life once, it is important to cherish every minute. Allowing stupid arguments, a practical joke or problems at work to ruin a solid relationship is not worth the hassle.

**2** *Things happen for a reason.* I really struggled with this concept for a long time, thinking that things only happen because I make them happen. My friend Jen would always tell me that everything happened for a reason, even if it wasn't understandable at first. After I was not accepted into Columbia University for graduate school, I became more open to my options and realized that grad school wasn't my best option.

People are too worried about making things work exactly one way, and they often overlook the many other options. Instead, allow plans to develop over time, and

things will usually work themselves out.

**3** *Keep in touch with old friends.* Sadly, Elon's class of 2002 will probably never be together again as a whole after graduation.

We each will go our separate ways, spreading ourselves out around the country and the world, ending one exciting chapter of our lives to begin an even more exciting one out in the real world. Friends will always come and go from our lives, but work to maintain relationships with the friends who made a difference in your life or hold a special place in your heart. Whether this is through the occasional visit, e-mail or phone calls, these are the people who were there with you through some of the craziest years of your life, and you don't want to lose the memories you shared with each other.

**4** *Don't always make plans. Spontaneity makes life more exciting.* When I spent a semester abroad in London, I got on the plane without any plans or lists of places I had to go, wanted to go

and would go if I had the time. I went with absolutely no plans at all, and I had the time of my life. While most of us are used to some organization, it can be very refreshing to throw plans out the windows sometimes and see what happens.

**5** *Be true to yourself.* More than anything else I have learned during my four years at Elon, I have grown comfortable with myself and am not afraid to go against the norm. While societal standards do place some restrictions on what one can and cannot do, do not feel you need to conform exactly to the norm. Find yourself and be true to that person because it doesn't matter what other people think of you as long as you are confident.

**6** *Above all, be happy in what you do.* Everyone wants to be happy, but millions of Americans report not being happy or satisfied with what they do. Strive to find a job that challenges you to push your talents, but that is also very satisfying. No one wants to be stuck in a dead-end job, and while many college graduates start off in positions other than what they desire, you should always be looking for the things that make you truly happy. It took me until my senior year in college to realize writing made me happy, even though I had

been writing for years. I always knew in the back of my head that I could write well, but I wanted to find something else, something more exciting to do. However, I now can see that writing is not only a very marketable skill, but it is something I enjoy and can continue to do without getting tired of it.

Each of these things has helped me become the person I am today. Now, here we stand, on the verge of graduating college and with plans to make a difference, have some fun and change the world. Never forget how hard you worked to get here or those people who helped you along the way. Those friends, professors and others who guided you during each step, held your hand when you were weak and supported you throughout the journey played an important role in your college career. Don't forget to thank them on this special day.

And as each of us goes our separate ways, whether to California, China or down the road to Greensboro, we will take with us all the memories, the knowledge and the lessons that changed our view of life. Take your Elon Experience, everything you gained from both inside and outside the classroom, and rock the world.

And as I bid Elon adieu, I want to thank my fellow members of the Class of 2002. You have made the ride more than worth it.

## Four years shaped by challenge

**Josh Phoebus**  
Columnist

Challenge yourself. I feel this advice is the most important advice to leave to the students. Personally, choosing to face four specific challenges were the most important decisions I made during my four years as a student at Elon.

Taking up challenges can be scary. I was anxious prior to trying to get involved in SGA as a wide-eyed freshman. However, that organization has provided me with an invaluable opportunity to serve my fellow students and participate in a small way in the life of Elon. Introduction to Economics with Dr. Barbour was the second major challenge I faced at Elon. It was a challenge because it was the first class in

college I decided to take in which I wasn't really sure prior to taking the class whether I would be able to understand the material being taught in the classroom.

The third challenge was Ghana. There had been a regular group of students going during the Winter Term every year but there had only been a handful prior to my departure that had gone to Ghana to study for a semester. How would I handle being out of the United States for the first time? Would I be able to leave Elon behind for four months? Taking that step of faith provided me with experiences that will stay with me for a lifetime.

Finally, my greatest challenge was learning when to not take on any more challenges. It was a challenge to learn to commit to being truly dedicated to one vision.

For me, that vision was the vision of Campus Outreach. What will your vision be?

I leave you not with my own words but with the words of one of America's most dynamic leaders who was never afraid to face a challenge. He once said:

"The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again...and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best, knows the triumph of high achievement; and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

-Theodore Roosevelt

## THE PENDULUM

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A weekly newspaper is truly a weekly miracle for the students who produce it. This year, the Pendulum staff really reached for the stars by completing 25 regular and three special editions. A special thank you goes to the people who believed in our crazy ideas and made the dream of a graduation edition a reality.

The Pendulum wishes our seniors the best of luck. Liz and Vitak, you are the best!