

Elon faculty discusses importance of knowing a second language

by Neel Arora, April 9, 2009

A panel of five Elon faculty members from various disciplines discussed at McKinnon today the importance of learning a foreign language and developing an intercultural skill-set in a world that is being globalized impetuously.

Each professor shared a different perspective to reason the relevance and importance of a second language in today's world.

Dr. Ketevan Kupatadze, a Spanish professor at Elon who emigrated from Georgia to pursue a doctorate at Emory University, illustrated the prospects for graduate studies in foreign languages.

In the field of foreign language study, almost all students are granted a stipend that provides approximately \$1,500 a month, health insurance and compensation for study abroad programs, she said. In essence, students granted acceptances into these programs teach classes instead of paying tuition.

The difference between graduate study and under-graduate study however, is not so much in the pay structure.

"It is the emphasis on doing something instead of memorizing material" and "applying your knowledge" among students who are interested in the same material, Kupatadze said.

She added that in turn, this opens up numerous possibilities for the future.

Dr. William Vincent applied linguistic anthropology with his experiences in West Africa and elsewhere. His discussion explained the scientific reasoning behind language from an anatomical perspective in an attempt to trace its genealogy.

Two structural changes in the human brain trace the origin of language: the Broca's area located on the surface of the left temporal lobe in the brain and associated with language skills, and the Vaulted Basicranium, which allows the larynx's movement to produce complex sound. They are estimated to have been seen in fossil records for the first time nearly 2.4 million years ago he said, dating the origin of language relations.

"Language is an important part of the human condition," he emphasized.

Vincent also narrated some of his foreign experiences and observations in northwest Amazon and West Africa, where he worked and lived. Ethnocentrism can be diminished through the study of foreign culture, he said while placing the "importance of language in a cultural context."

Dr. Brian Niehaus explained the changing trend of the global economy and the importance a foreign language will have as an asset in the business world.

In 1950 the United States dominated 75 percent of Gross World Product and by 2000 it had dropped to 23