

Learning with the Lamberts

Leo and Lori Lambert to participate in South Africa study abroad program

Rachel Cieri
Features Editor

This spring, 30 students applied to the South Africa Winter Term study abroad program expecting the typical experience from years past. But it wasn't until the class' pre-trip meeting on Nov. 10 that the students got an unexpected surprise.

"I told them I had a surprise for them," said English professor and South Africa program leader Prudence Layne. "When they came to class, the students didn't believe us."

When Elon University President Leo Lambert and his wife, Lori, walked in the door, Layne said she asked the students if they knew why the pair was visiting.

"They said 'Are you coming with us?' They went crazy," Layne said.

This Winter Term, the couple will accompany Layne, human services professor Sandra Reid and the students on the trip.

"I hope there are still students enrolled," Lambert joked.

Lambert said he and his wife decided to take part in the program after an invitation from Layne.

"I was talking with Professor Layne one day about her course, and she said, 'Well, you should come,'" he said. "And I thought, 'Wow, what a great idea.'"

The Lamberts said they hope to enjoy something similar to a student experience, complete with coach class flights and long bus rides.

Though they will not partake in the written class work, they have been reading the same texts assigned to students to prepare for their journey and Lambert will even write a post for the class blog.

"We are on the same flight as the students," Lambert said. "We'll be doing all the same things the students

are doing, staying in the same hotels, and I think the only thing that will be different is that Lori and I will be roommates."

Because of board meetings scheduled later in the month, Lambert will only accompany the program through its first 10 days in Cape Town, South Africa, but Lori will stay for the full length of the trip.

The South Africa program is a service-oriented experience that allows students to interact with community partners while studying issues the region faces. The students participate in short internships with programs like Adopt-a-Student and The Global Links Library and Literacy Campaign during their visit.

"When the students are doing their internship experiences, (Lori) is arranging some opportunities for the students to visit hospitals and schools, and she's really looking forward to that," Lambert said.

Lambert will be the first Elon president to visit Africa in an official capacity, but he is not the first administrator to participate in a Winter Term study abroad program. Executive Vice President Gerry Francis still maintains relationships with many of the students from the programs in which he participated.

"You have an opportunity to get to know people when you're eating breakfast, lunch and dinner and sitting on the bus next to them and so forth," Lambert said. "We are excited to travel. We love being with students and I think it's going to be a great experience."

Layne said the students are just as excited as the Lamberts.

"I think it will certainly raise expectations and what's appropriate (for the trip)," Layne said. "I think they're all excited to get to know (the Lamberts) on a personal level."



Elon University President Leo Lambert and his wife, Lori, will accompany a group of students and professors on the South Africa Winter Term study abroad program this January.

Lambert said his decision to participate in the program was twofold. First, he wanted to have a student's experience on a Winter Term study abroad trip, and second, he was interested in visiting Africa for his own personal education.

"One of the most important experiences, not only of my presidency at Elon but of my entire life, is having the opportunity to meet Archbishop Desmond Tutu when he was our Convocation for Honors speaker here several years ago, and I just have always admired the man," he said. "He was a guest in our home for two days and I came to really respect him. I

think the story of South Africa is such an interesting and compelling story of our times, and I'm just anxious to see that first-hand."

The Elon community should not be concerned about Lambert's absence, though. He said he is often off campus for extended periods of time and the President's Office has a long-established system to determine who is in charge.

"Provost (Steven) House is usually the person that backs me up," Lambert said. "If I'm gone and the provost is gone, I'm designated as the administrator on call. I have an international cell phone and I'm a phone call away."

Alumnus returns to Elon campus to share successes

Alex Trice
Multimedia Editor

Though his days now are filled with travel around the world — from London, Cairo and Beirut to Damascus, Madrid and Los Angeles — Jordanian filmmaker and 2005 Elon alumnus Laith al-Majali takes time to visit his alma mater every year.

al-Majali came to Elon as a freshman from Amman, Jordan, when he became the first recipient of the King Hussein scholarship, given specifically to Jordanian students at Elon.

The scholarship was started by Queen Rania of Jordan after she visited Elon as a guest speaker in 2000.

"I came at an interesting point," al-Majali said. "Two weeks after I got here, Sept. 11 happened and I was the only Arab on campus, so that was quite a defining time in who I was and who I ended up becoming."

Though al-Majali majored in communications and devoted a lot of his time to creating video projects, he was also involved with the

international program and the Isabella Cannon Leadership Program as a Leadership Fellow.

It didn't take long before faculty and staff began to notice al-Majali's hard work and potential.

"He excelled right from the beginning," coordinator of video projects Jason McMerty said. "He's one of the most hard-working people I know."

Since graduation in 2005, Majali has continued to work hard.

He became a pioneer of Jordanian cinema when he produced and edited the 2007 Sundance Award-winning film, "Captain Abu Raed."

The film, which is about an airport janitor who makes a difference in the lives of those around him, is the first feature film to come from Jordan.

al-Majali now has his own company in Jordan — a film, photography and music company — where he said he hopes to combine several aspects of the creative arts in various collaborations and works, such as feature films,



Laith al-Majali, a 2005 graduate, has won an award from the Sundance Film Festival and has worked on high-profile projects such as photographing the King of Jordan.

documentaries and music videos.

Some of his current projects include a book of photography and music videos for hip hop artists in Los Angeles and Jordan. al-Majali also said he was in the development process of making another feature film.

While he has worked very hard to reach the success he has now, al-Majali said much of his achievements have been possible because of the engaging experiences he had at Elon.

"I learned a lot, made a lot of

friends," al-Majali said. "Most importantly, the school gave me the opportunity to continue my education, and that's why I always come back and give back to the students that are sitting in the same seats I was a couple of years ago."

He stressed the importance of being curious about the world and human beings.

"We always talk about the 'Elon bubble,'" al-Majali said. "All I say is, burst the bubble."



al-Majali has shot numerous music videos for Arab hip-hop artists, like "Black is Beautiful" by Cmack, above, and "Destiny" by Omar Offendum, left.