

# Religion, percentages and community: The role of spirituality on campus

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Faith is no stranger at Elon University. In 1889, members of the United Church of Christ founded the university. More than 100 years later, religion is still an important aspect of life and learning at Elon.

In terms of religion, Elon is a homogenous campus. About 63.4 percent of students on Elon's campus believe in some sect of Christianity.

Although only 1.6 percent of students on campus identify with the United Church of Christ, Christian religions are still the majority at Elon, according to the comprehensive biannual report released by the Registrar in February. Identified Catholics make up 23.5 percent of students who reported their religious preferences.

"I am constantly impressed and awed by the strength in the faith of students," said Rev. Gerry Waterman, who joined Elon five years ago as the Catholic Campus Minister.

Elon has been supportive of students religious needs. That strong faith convinced Elon to create secure, 24-hour access to Holt Chapel's Eucharistic chapel three years ago. That same support resulted in the Newman Center last year, located in the former Holland House on South Campus.

Although the building technically belongs to Catholic Campus Ministries, it is shared with other religious organizations and serves as a place to gather and hold dinner events. More groups, such as Hillel, expect to receive their own facilities later. For now, the Newman Center functions in the way religion or spirituality should — by bringing people together.

Steven Norris, a junior and Catholic, said religion puts life into perspective and is essential. Norris participates in Inter Varsity, a multi-denominational organization on campus, and co-facilitates a small discussion group with fellow junior Angie Hannah. The group meets once a week to tackle and discuss tough questions that aren't answered by the church.

"I think most people on campus, including myself, have a sense of faith," Norris said. "But the majority are searching for the specifics of our faith. I think it has a lot to do with where we are at this time in our life."

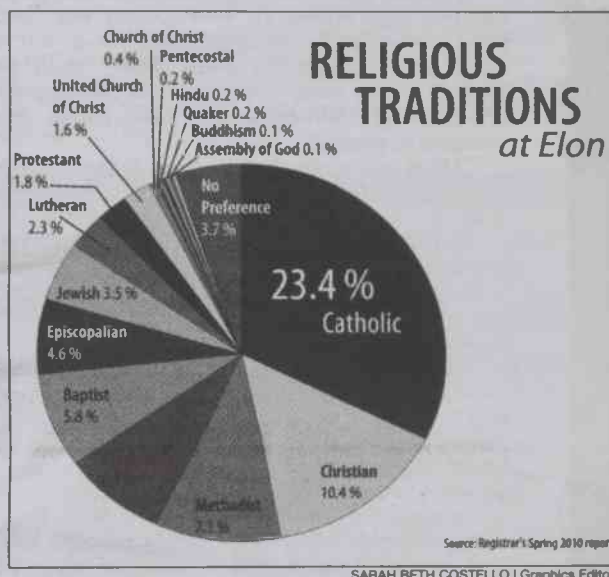
Hannah explained that her involvement with religious organizations on campus has a lot to do with community building and fellowship, not just religion.

"It's about having a community you can go to whenever you need help," Hannah said. "I think too often people focus on how our religions are different instead of focusing on what we have in common. InterVarsity gives us a chance to do just that. It brings people together who have similar beliefs, but don't even know it."

But devotion isn't easy when students are taking 18 or more credits a semester, especially if a student is involved in other groups.



Rev. Gerry Waterman, who ministers to the university's Catholic community, said he is constantly impressed by the strength of Elon students' faith.



Sophomore Charlie Johnson explained that while he considers himself a religious Presbyterian, his religious activity takes a backseat while he is on campus.

"I've been to church three times since I've been

to Elon but I go to church every Sunday when I'm home," Johnson said. "It's difficult to get to church and people don't expect you to go, it's sort of excused."

Although Christian denominations are the majority on campus, a significant amount of students, almost 30 percent, chose not to indicate religious preference. A smaller amount (3.7 percent) indicated no preference.

Freshman Caitlyn Wang Fleisig explained she decided not to release her religious preference when she filed her application to attend Elon.

"I just didn't understand," Wang Fleisig said. "What purpose is there in knowing that? If there is one, I didn't think it would serve me well identifying myself as an atheist in a Christian school."

Junior Cody Greene considers himself "pretty much nothing." But Greene participates in Iron Tree Blooming, the Zen meditation group on society. Although meditation is primarily considered a Buddhist practice, it is also a way for people to concentrate and center themselves in this hectic and hurried modern age. The form allows Greene to clear his head and de-stress.

"It's spiritual but not religious, it's an extension of living with compassion," Greene said. "It's having faith, but not in religion. It's having a sense of purpose."

## Chatroulette vs. CampusLIVE: Is the new college-student-geared alternative safer?

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Bored? Why not video chat with a random stranger? Many people today choose to do exactly that by accessing the increasingly popular Chatroulette.com. Chatroulette, which generates a live webcam connection with you and a stranger, has gained rapid popularity, as well as scrutiny. CampusLIVE, a college-based Web site has recently incorporated a video feature similar to Chatroulette, raising the question whether or not the restricted access for only students will make a difference in safety.

The 3-month-old Web site is free and requires no registration, merely a webcam and a microphone. Chatroulette is the brainchild of 17-year-old Andrey Ternovskiy, who hails from Moscow.

Chatroulette, advertised as a "game," displays a stranger's video box on the left, as well as your own and provides an AIM-like chat box to the right if audio is disabled. The site has thousands of users a day, and at peak times, up to 85,000 people are online available for chatting, according to a CBS News story. While users often can meet strangers with interesting stories to share there is an equally high risk of encountering users engaging in illicit sexual behavior in front of the camera.

So why do people keep pressing "next"? Curiosity. Freshman Alex Lake, who uses the site for entertainment

purposes, has been able to find connections through Chatroulette.

"I met people in Minnesota that knew people I also know, so that was really cool," Lake said.

Other people use Chatroulette as a way to meet new people.

"I haven't done Chatroulette that many times," freshman Will Brisco said. "But it's interesting to meet people. My friends and I have fun with it."

The Web site has received just as much scrutiny as it has visitors, though. The site states an age limit of 16 years or older, but no authentication is required. Some have referred to the Web site as a "pedophiles paradise," as young users are readily available to accidentally stumble upon predators.

"There is a lot of illegal activity on this site that is hard to enforce," said Ernie Allen, president of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, in a CBSNews.com article.

But Lake disagrees and said the site is only detrimental when used incorrectly.

"It's really only dangerous when you are using it in the wrong way. Obviously you shouldn't tell people a lot of personal information," he said.

Users are discouraged from chatting alone in the random roulette and are encouraged to always have their mouse readily available to click "next."

"Just about anything in our culture can be dangerous or just

plain fun," said Carol Nix, School of Communications faculty member.

"Every technological advance brings about the need to examine our collective responsibility, civility and common sense" Nix said. "The exposure to unsavory or illicit material is unquestionably increased due to technology. It is how we respond to the imminent progression of these forms of social media that is critical."

Even some graphic genitalia doesn't seem to deter Elon students. Freshman Lizzy Larson uses Chatroulette with friends and has come across some interesting images, yet she continues to visit the Web site.

"No, I have not stopped using the site," Larson said. "The images just adds to the hilarity. I think it's really funny, but I see how it could be offensive to some."

Nix can see the positive side of Chatroulette as well.

"In a utopian world, a site like Chatroulette could ultimately be an inspiring way to exchange new ideas and mutually educate and entertain its users," Nix said. "It could expose us to entirely new worlds and provide exciting global collaborative opportunities."

In 2007, students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst founded CampusLIVE, coined "The College Homepage." The Web site encompasses university e-mail, athletics and news as well as links to Facebook and Twitter. The Web

site, which released a homepage for Elon students on March 1, has newly incorporated a videochat feature similar to Chatroulette.

"It's based on Chatroulette, but we had the vision of creating a videochat tool that's strictly for college students," said Jess Morgan, director of marketing for CampusLIVE.

Aiming to avoid the same dangers Chatroulette poses, CampusLIVE requires students to use their university e-mail address when registering to use the Web site, to ensure their status as college students.

"Students have the ability to call up and videochat with their Facebook friends who are registered users of CampusLIVE, or to find a random college student from all over the country," Morgan said. "This is also a free alternative to talking to your friends who are abroad. Most importantly, we have eliminated the people that make Chatroulette creepy."

While the site has received less usage than Chatroulette, Morgan says they only began heavily marketing it March 21.

"We have received nothing but positive feedback and some great ideas from the students," Morgan said. "In the future we will be adding filtering options so you can narrow down who you want to come across in the random search. The possibilities are endless, and we will be looking for the students to contribute ideas."