

# Liberal arts devalued, losing support at universities nationwide

Caitlin O'Donnell  
News Editor

Try to envision Elon University's campus without sculptures lining the road to Arts West and student-produced plays lighting up McCrary Theatre. This may seem impossible for most, but for students at campuses across the nation, this is becoming reality.

As budgets tighten, many universities are forced to make cuts to the programs they offer, often programs in the arts and humanities, according to a recent report from Insider Higher Ed.

Drew Perry, associate professor of English, said this derives from a general devaluing of the liberal arts around the country and threatens the foundation of what universities stand for.

According to a recent poll conducted by the Orange County Register in California, 42 percent of respondents said the loss of students in the liberal arts would badly damage the curriculum. Thirty-five percent argued the liberal arts are overrated.

Perry said there is a problem when a university assumes they have to deliver a "product."

"Some students and parents might feel somehow that so-called practical classes and majors are a better use of time and money than others," he said.

If the university places emphasis only on what the students and parents think they want, rather than a complete education, there is no need for any requirements. In this case, Perry said, the university becomes more like a trade school.

Perry said the idea that some majors are more practical than others is an idea he can't comprehend.

"Any school removing liberal arts from its curriculum is announcing to the world that it's basically uninterested in being a school," Perry said. "I hope in the course of suggesting that art history is a viable major, I don't suggest that communications is not."

Perry said while some consider majors in the liberal arts to be useless, he thinks that an education does not always necessarily equate to a job.

"Whether it's coursework in accounting or dance or political science or English, an education should first and foremost provide a person with new ways of seeing and understanding the world," he said. "English does

## ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER POLL:

*"what impact will cutting liberal arts class sections have?"*

**203 said: it will badly damage the curriculum**

**83 said: it will moderately damage the curriculum**

**33 said: it will have no impact**

**171 said: the liberal arts are overrated**

Source: Orange County Register

SARAH BETH COSTELLO | Graphics Editor

that, if it's done right, and accounting does that if it's done right, too."

Though he majored in advertising, Perry has used his love for liberal arts, specifically English, to begin a career as an author.

This year, he published a book titled "This is Just Exactly Like You," and he credits his ability to write to the time he spent in school.

Kevin Boyle, professor of English, said the study of liberal arts is the place to go for those interested in thinking and learning about other cultures and the deep recesses of the heart.

"What you're actually learning is important — communication, writing, speaking well, developing teamwork strategies," he said. "I think any major has that component, but maybe the liberal arts even more so."

Jess Kildow, a senior creative writing major, said the beauty of a degree in the liberal arts is that it doesn't mean the same thing to everyone.

While Kildow said her parents consider her degree intangible and essentially worthless when it comes to finding a job, Boyle said a degree in the humanities

gives students the opportunity to work in a variety of fields.

According to a 2001 poll conducted by the Humanities Indicators Project, liberal arts graduates went on to work an array of jobs, including education, engineering and architecture, writing, editing, engineering and medicine, among others.

While Perry said he thinks universities should certainly respond to their constituencies, he said they should also act as a university, meaning they value the liberal arts as much as any other course of study.

Boyle said that he doubts Elon would ever cut liberal arts program from the curriculum.

"We're a liberal arts college that combines some professional programs," he said. "The College of Arts and Sciences is definitely a key player at the university."

Perry said that, no matter what, students should be pursuing their dreams and passions above all else.

"A college education is voluntary. You're there of your own volition to make yourself a better person," he said. "If one's passions align themselves with the liberal arts, then that's where they belong."

## Universities ban professors from collecting royalties, not Elon

Marlena Chertock  
Reporter

When Connie Book, associate dean of the School of Communications at Elon University, was choosing textbooks for her class, she found that there were none focusing on exactly what she needed. As a result, she wrote her own book on digital television to better meet the purposes of her class.

Professors assigning their own books to classes have prompted discussions on ethics at universities around the country. Officials at George Mason University have discussed instating a ban on professors collecting royalties off the books they write and assign for classes. According to Elon officials, a similar ban will not be established at Elon anytime soon.

Professors write many books often to ensure tenure, Book said. These books are often assigned to their own classes or others within the school.

At universities around the country, there are new rules to keep professors from profiting off their students.

The University of Kansas is requiring professors to donate royalties made off their own books assigned to their students to departments, schools, scholarship funds or other nonprofit groups, according to a USA Today article.

Communications professor David Copeland, who has published numerous textbooks that are used around the communications school, said the royalties that professors receive from individual textbook sales are minimal. He said authors make only a few dollars on books sold to a class the size of Elon's.

"If you were teaching in a program with classes of 300 to 500, which does happen at many state universities, then the royalty issue might be different," he said. "But you'd still only be talking about a couple of hundred dollars probably."

Book said if professors assign their own textbooks to students it could inherently be a conflict of interest if there are other books on the subject available. She said professors should focus on providing textbooks that

are best suited to the course and offer a good resource for students. If there are other textbooks available, those should be considered.

Joel Karty, professor of chemistry, said there is more conflict of interest at larger institutions, such as the University of Texas or Austin. He said it should be looked into at these universities, where the money awarded could be large enough to affect the faculty's decision.

Karty said the most important aspect of deciding what textbooks to assign is the benefit of the students rather than the money.

"From my own experience, the reason to write a textbook is you think you can do a better job than what's out there," he said. "If you end up producing something that is indeed a better product and then all of a sudden because of the money issue you can't use it, it's not for the benefit of the students."

Karty said he would give up the money if he was barred from using his book in class because of royalties gained.

"The money would be the thing to go," he said. "But I don't think there's a mechanism by which textbook companies would legally not give royalties."

Book said the bans on professors collecting royalties are policies anticipating a problem rather than solving an existing one.

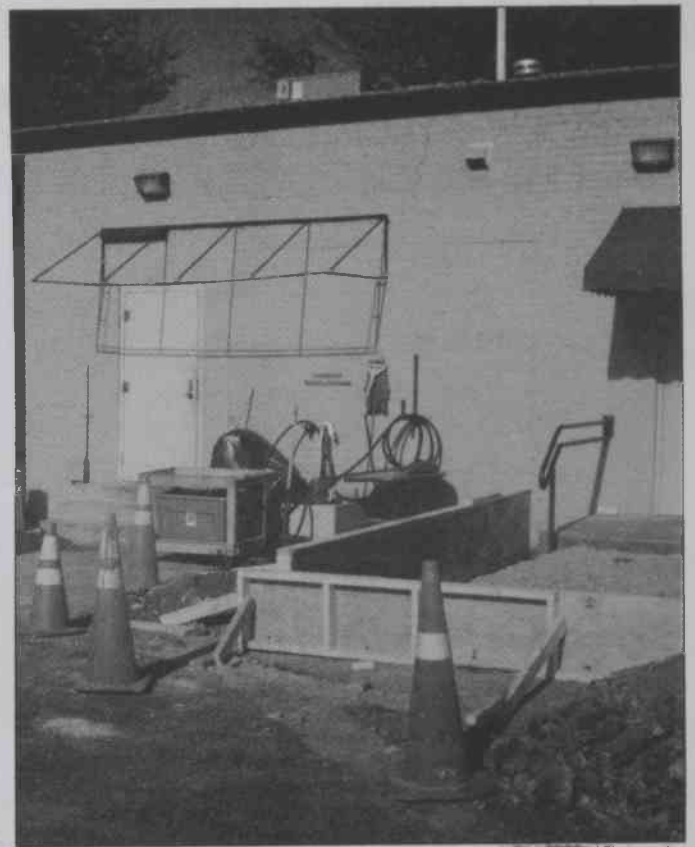
"It's not like this is some widespread problem," she said. "A lot of the times I find in the U.S. we write policies anticipating problems."

She said faculty members are not in the business of writing textbooks to make money. It is not a profit venture, she said.

What could prove a bigger problem is consulting collaborations, according to Book. She said she often does consulting during the summer when she is off her contract.

"A lot of times faculty are asked to work together on projects," she said. "Say I work for a company and it asks me to research a certain topic. I could have my class doing the research. Now that's a real conflict of interest because that money could be thousands of dollars."

## Acorn to build addition



JACK DODSON | Photographer

Anna Johnson  
Managing Editor

Construction of an Acorn Coffee Shop storage room and walk-in refrigerator began Monday. The construction is expected to last four weeks and will close several parking lots behind the building.

Max Akhlaghi, Acorn's manager, said Brown and Company and Acorn shared storage and refrigerator space because they were both operated by ARAMARK. Now that ownership of the Brown and Company building has moved to a private owner, Akhlaghi said Acorn is in need of its own storage and refrigerator space.

Laddie Griffin, operations manager of Building Trades, said all the spaces along the chain link fence behind Acorn will be closed because of the construction.