

Campaign, student-led committee work to encourage seniors to give back to the university

Caitlin O'Donnell
News Editor

To Khirey Walker, he wouldn't be the person he is today without the four years he spent as a student at Elon University. The senior took to the stage Sept. 16 in Rhodes Stadium alongside President Leo Lambert and shared with about 300 members of the senior class the importance of giving back to the university that had invested so much in him.

"The main thing I wanted the other seniors to remember is the transitioning phase and how Elon still will be a part of us, even after we graduate," Walker said. "As a future alumni, it is imperative that we remember our time here at Elon and try to help individuals after us to have an equal or even better experience during their four years."

With Walker's speech at the Senior Class Celebration, the university officially announced this year's senior class giving campaign, which is working toward a goal of having 20 percent of the class of 2011 give back to Elon.

John Barnhill, assistant vice president for University Advancement, said unlike past years, students have the opportunity to support all of the annual funds, particularly Elon's greatest needs. This list includes the Elon Experiences, student scholarships and the four schools at Elon — Elon College, the Love School of Business, the School of Communications and the School of Education.

"Students will be able to pick between those groups and what they care most about," he said. "A number of students will pick the Elon Experience they care most about, or if they graduated from the business school, they'll give to business and so on."

For the first time, seniors who give will also automatically be enrolled in the IGNITE program, the university's giving program for young alumni.

According to Alex Nicodem, a 2009 graduate working with the campaign, events will be held for IGNITE members, and seniors will have the opportunity to attend. At homecoming this year, a sustainability tour of Lindner Hall will be held for young alumni and new student members of IGNITE.

"Students will be able to network with those young alumni as well as get to know them," Nicodem said. "More importantly, you're giving them a chance to talk to those going through the transition from a student to a young professional. It might be able to help move them in some direction."

This theme of transitioning is one that Nicodem said works throughout the entire campaign.

"By connecting with IGNITE, we get seniors in the mindset that it's their turn," he said. "For 21 years, my parents paid for everything and made donations to everything. Now, it's our turn to start giving and relay that message to (seniors)."

Barnhill said the most effective way to get the word out is through word-of-

mouth among students rather than rely on university administration.

As a result, a senior class giving committee of current Elon students was formed to not only assist with planning events, but to reach out to their peers.

"The more successful the committee is in reaching their friends and getting the word out, that's what counts," Barnhill said. "We want it to be owned by the students."

According to Nicodem, the committee members span a multitude of organizations on campus.

Natalie Lampert, a senior at Elon who is involved with the committee, said Nicodem hand-picked members because of the different areas they're involved in on campus, the people and groups they know, the connections they have formed and their personal strengths.

"That was really cool to see," Lampert said. "It means we're all engaged in meetings, we all have a purpose to be there, we're all on the same page. Talk about getting things done."

After Walker shared his story, Lampert said the committee is working on moving forward. At this point, they have set up a website and are planning more events for the fall that will encourage seniors to give back.

"One thing we're working on is the 'tap five' idea," she said. "(You) give back and then tell five, just five, of your friends why they should give back, too. And then have them tap five of their friends."

Nicodem said the committee is also currently formatting a copy of Walker's speech that will be sent through e-mail to the entire senior class.

"We're looking forward to Khirey's video because it will reach all of the seniors," he said. "The (campaign) hasn't exploded yet, but we're working on the message now."

Michael Nowak, senior class president and member of the senior giving committee, said seniors will get reminders about giving online and also at tables at various events on campus.

"Without student giving, the university wouldn't run," he said. "There's a point in the year when tuition stops paying and the giving then kicks in."

Nowak said the committee would rather see everyone give \$1 than have a group of 300 raise \$3,000.

"The amount doesn't matter; it's about being unified as a senior class," he said.

To Jim Piatt, vice president for University Advancement, that message is one of building a culture of philanthropy among the Elon community.

"One of the things we would really love to share with the seniors and all students, for that matter, is how important private gifts to the university really are," he said. "As they transition into becoming alums, a big piece of that is what their relationship with the university will be after they graduate."

According to Piatt, the percentage of alumni giving to the university says a lot of about the foundation of the institution.

"When we make large proposals

SENIOR GIVING

Seniors have the option of contributing to annual funds:

- *Elon's Greatest Needs
- *Elon Experiences
- *Elon Student Scholarships
- *Elon College of Arts and Sciences
- *Love School of Business
- *School of Communications
- *School of Education
- *School of Law
- *Phoenix Club

GRAPHIC BY SARAH BETH COSTELLO

to outside (groups) and even outside individuals, one of the things they always look for is giving to the university," he said. "It sends a really important message about how important giving is in our culture. If we don't have evidence that our own alumni support the institution, (they) may say 'if your own alumni don't support you, why should we?'"

Barnhill said a large number of alumni are doing monthly payroll or credit card deductions, giving \$10 a month rather than a gift of \$100 at one time. He said it's comparable to giving up a cup of coffee.

"If people put it into perspective like that, it's doing it over time," he said. "Many think a small amount doesn't make a difference. Everybody can participate and every gift matters. We just need to keep sharing that story."

Though the goal is 20 percent, Barnhill said they hope to reach 100 percent participation.

"Looking at trends and history, that's very difficult to do," he said. "Part of what we have to do is help students and alums realize is that any size gift makes a difference and it's the cumulative impact of that."

According to Nicodem, 18 percent of seniors gave to Elon last year.

"When we look at the number of other colleges who've made the switch from gifts to campaign, their numbers shot up by 20 to 30 percent," he said.

Seniors are currently being asked to give \$20.11, representative of their year of graduation.

"If someone can give less than that, that's fine, if someone wants to make a bigger impact, that's fine too," Barnhill said. "Everyone has different resources. If we think of it in terms of personal participation, every person who gives

Students and alumni voice opinions on the importance of giving back to Elon:

"As future alumni, it is imperative that we remember our time here at Elon and try to help individuals after us to have an equal or even better experience during their four years." — Khirey Walker, senior

"I love Elon and have experienced so much through being here, and just as Elon's made it possible for me to do so many neat things during my years here, I want to help make sure Elon can continue doing the same for students after I'm gone." — Natalie Lampert, senior

"Even if everyone gives one dollar, that would be something." — Michael Nowak, senior class president

"I graduated from Elon and when I think back about what transformed my life, it wouldn't have been possible if someone hadn't believed in the institution and supported it." — John Barnhill, assistant vice president for University Advancement

"One of the things we would really love to share with the seniors and all students for that matter is how important private gifts to the university really are." — Jim Piatt, vice president for University Advancement

counts as 100 percent."

Lampert said the key part of the campaign and giving committee as a whole is to encourage seniors to give back to the university they've called home for four years.

"The key thing is that every little bit counts, and it's really true," she said. "The point is to give, even if it's just \$5. That's a couple cups of coffee and spending this is way more satisfying."

In his speech, Walker drew attention to the changes that have taken place on campus since the senior class arrived.

"We need to consider how far the university has come since this class arrived in fall 2007," he said. "With the creation of Lindner Hall, the revitalization of Alumni Gym and the construction of the new Alumni Field House, we have been a part of Elon's transition in the growth phase."

More than that, Walker said Elon has provided memories, friendships and relationships that he hopes will last the rest of his life.

"The conversations, people and overall adventure as a student here has really prepared me for the outside world because I was able to grow and develop, not only as a student, but as a man," he said. "Elon lives inside each and every person that attends here and having the opportunity to give back and show the appreciation is the least we can do."

THE PENDULUM

THE PENDULUM

www.elon.edu/pendulum

Now hiring an Assistant Business Manager!

Are you interested in advertising and business in the news?

Are you organized and detail oriented?

Are you a Business or Communications major?

Are you a sophomore or junior seeking involvement in the leading campus news source?

This position may be for you!

Stop by the Pendulum office for applications or contact E.J. Young at youngpendulum@gmail.com