

There's something in the water: Lake Mary Nell subject of class analysis

Libby Dean
Reporter

When freshman Matt Dowdle retrieved one of the prize-winning boats from the Polar Bear Plunge this January, he had more than the taste of victory in his mouth.

During the scramble to grab one of the colorful boats tossed into the water to receive a prize, Dowdle got a mouthful of the lake water from Lake Mary Nell, as well as high ammonia and non-pathogenic E. coli, to be exact.

"It didn't taste like how normal water should," Dowdle said. "It was grimy. When I went home, I immediately took a shower and brushed my teeth for over a half hour."

The water conditions of Lake Mary Nell, along with the other lakes around campus, including Lake Verona and the "Elon Homes" lake, have been subjects of analysis for Professor Joshua Kapfer's introduction to environmental studies lab.

Kapfer has been conducting lake water analysis for more than 10 years and said his students are most surprised by the presence of high ammonia

concentrations and of non-pathogenic E. coli in the water.

Tracy Schell, senior and co-organizer of the Polar Bear Plunge, said the cleanliness of Lake Mary Nell is taken into consideration during the planning process of the event. In Lake Mary Nell, a ledge drops off and people have gotten scraped in the past, so Schell and the Resident Student Association have taken precautions to ensure the people who get injured can receive care.

Participants signed waivers and were told that if they sustained any cuts or scrapes, they should go to the health center immediately to have them treated. Every participant was required to wear closed-toed shoes and a lifeguard was present. Because of the large number of participants, the jumps took place in several groups. No injuries or infections from the water were reported after the Jan. 20 event.

"At the Polar Bear Plunge this year, we had one of the biggest turnouts in the event's history," Schell said. "People realize that the lake is gross and it's cold outside. It's the things like how cold and dirty it is that make

the event more memorable, more of an adventure."

Freshman Tyler Oberle, governor of North Area Council, said the Polar Bear Plunge was a huge success.

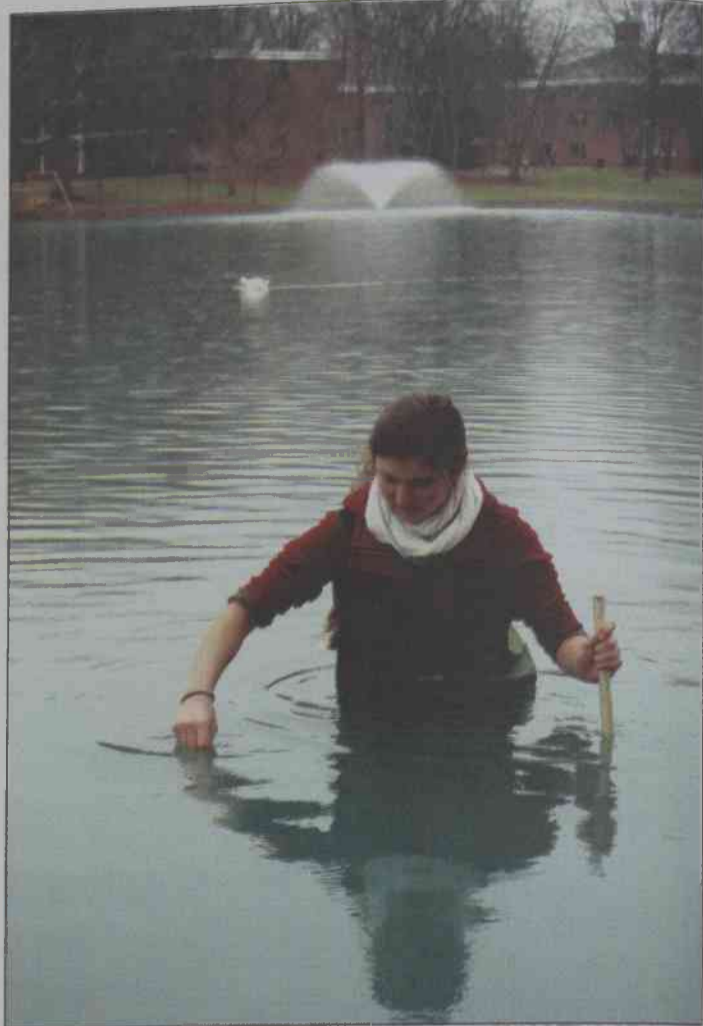
More than 160 people took the plunge and even more attended the event. Oberle said the day of the event had sunny weather, and people could see the discolorations of the lake water.

"It was a sunny day out so you could see the brown, green-blue water," Oberle said. "Yes, it's disgusting, it's cold, it's dirty, but that all makes it a once-in-a-college experience."

The Polar Bear Plunge is in its eighth year and has won RSA's Event of the Year previously.

The event surpassed expectations and has become an annual tradition of student bonding, Oberle said. Since no infections or other complications have been reported from the event, the Polar Bear Plunge will continue to be an Elon tradition.

"We all knew what we were getting into," Dowdle said. "How memorable would it be if there was an event that had people instead jump into a nice, warm indoor pool?"



JULIA SAYERS | Staff Photographer
Brianna Bailey tests water in Lake Mary Nell for an environmental studies class.

Elon's refusal to make exception may set housing precedent

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programs and options."

With regards to single-sex rooms and suites, Niki Turley, assistant dean of student, said the university has no official statement on why coed housing is prohibited on campus.

"I think that's just the way it has always been done," Turley said. "I don't know that we've really heard from students in a united voice about whether they want this or not."

Edwards said she has had a positive coed housing experience and thinks it should depend on the situation as to whether students take this route.

"We have a really unique situation," Edwards said. "We're very much just friends. It could become a fuzzy situation when it's romantic partners wanting to live together—students have to realize what they're getting into."

Brian O'Shea, assistant to the vice president of Student Life, said the coed housing movement is growing across the country and an increasing number of students seem to be getting on board.

Although Elon was unable to make an exception for Jeffords and adjust its coed housing policy in time for the 2011-2012 academic year, the administration said the university is

open to moving forward in examining this as an option for students in the future.

"We've come a long way and we'll continue to look at the future of housing, especially as we add different styles and different types," O'Shea said. "Elon wants to remain innovative and creative in housing, and I think the university is certainly responsive to students' requests."

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