

Convocation panelists encourage students to do what they love

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News Editor

Elon University students were encouraged to discover what they love and pursue it with passion at spring convocation April 7.

Brian Williams, managing editor and anchor of NBC Nightly News, served as a moderator during the event, which consisted of a panel of five national leaders.

The discussion centered around key challenges facing the world today including religious intolerance, partisanship in politics, education, fiscal responsibility and energy independence. The panel sought to not only explain these challenges, but suggest realistic ways to address them.

Williams was joined by David Gergen, adviser to four U.S. presidents and director of the Center for Public Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School; David Walker, former U.S. Comptroller General and head of the U.S. Government Accountability Office; Shirley Ann Jackson, physicist and president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; Eboo Patel, founder and president of the Interfaith Youth Core; and David Levin, co-founder of the Knowledge is Power program (KIPP).

"The title of the discussion is 'we can be better,'" Williams said. "In this nation, in this day and age, we sure can."

The panel began with a conversation about the current state and future of religious understanding.

Patel, a Muslim American whose family immigrated from India, said the ugliness of religious extremism makes the American values of tolerance and pluralism that much more important. The composition of America, of one people from all corners of the earth coming together to build a nation, is one of its strengths, he said.

"I think the first thing we have to do is get back to the deep values of faith and action, of service and cooperation," he said. "As challenging as it might be and as natural as frustration and anger might be at what feels like irrational intolerance, the path I follow, the path of Islam, the path of the prophets, the path of America is a path of trying to show magnanimity in the face of intolerance."

On the topic of debt, and in the face of a potential government shutdown last weekend, had a budget compromise not been reached in Washington, Walker said the United States has strayed from some of its traditional principles and values.

"Today, Washington is arguing over less than 1 percent of federal spending," he said. "It's like arguing about the bar tab on the Titanic. Leaders of both parties need to put country over party



Eboo Patel discusses the importance of interfaith work in response to a question from panel moderator Brian Williams at Elon University's spring convocation.

and progress over partisanship and need to learn from the past."

This means remembering that the nation was founded on the concept of opportunity, not entitlement, he said.

Williams also addressed the low international rankings of U.S. students in reading, science and math.

Levin said KIPP, a national network of 99 schools located in low-income neighborhoods in 20 states. The schools have doubled high school graduation rates, tripled matriculation to college and quadrupled the college graduation rate in those areas, he said.

"People want to feel special and like they belong to something," he said. "As, as a society, are not taking the promises to our children as if they were sacred. We care about our own kids, but not anyone else."

Jackson addressed the United States' "addiction" to fossil fuels. Currently, the nation is 60 percent dependent on foreign oil.

Energy security also affects national and economic security, Jackson said, and the nation can learn to rely on fossil fuels less if it is smarter about how they are handled.

"The situation in Japan, the BP oil spill and Katrina, issues in the Middle East and North Africa all tell us that we are facing intersecting vulnerabilities that require a national conversation and more sophisticated, committed approach to dealing with energy solutions," she said.

These solutions include a transparent

and well-functioning energy market, consistency of regulation, a sound infrastructure and innovation, she said.

At a time when 66 percent of Americans are not confident in the future and believe the nation is in decline, according to an NBC and Wall Street Journal poll, Gergen encouraged the audience not to give into pessimism.

"The hope is you all, as students, won't buy into that and accept it as an answer," he said. "The call to the generation is whether you can rally this country and help revive and rebuild it."

Part of the problem, Gergen said, is the lack of response to issues as they arise. Instead of responding immediately, the nation tends to "let them grow and fester." To counteract this trend, it is necessary for people to put the good of the country first, he said.

"There are too many people who think of themselves as strong Democrats or Republicans first and foremost and the country is secondary," he said. "We need to get over that, we need to get your generation involved."

To find the will to address these challenges, Walker said people should focus less on today and more on building a better tomorrow.

"The country does not have a plan that is future-focused, results-oriented around threat, risk and opportunity," he said. "And all too frequently, we wait until there is a crisis at our doorstep before we act. We have to recognize this is a great country but we're not as great as we think we are. We need to have a

plan."

Jackson said solutions could come not only from the young people of today but also from those outside the realm of politics.

"We spend a lot of time talking Washington-centric things but the truth is, there are a lot of great people in the country," she said. "There are leaders in business, the non-governmental sector, academia and in government at multiple levels."

Although Williams admitted the future may look bleak, he encouraged students to stand up and change the world they are inheriting.

"Imagine what you can do with that Elon energy and Elon brain," Williams said. "You know the stakes, we just laid them out for you. Are we going to go forward and act the way we know we can? Are we going to get along or are we going to fight?"

Patel closed the discussion by addressing how it's possible to put the ideas into action.

"Ultimately, when it comes to who you are in the world, you have to do what you love to do," he said. "How do you find what you love to do and how do you give it away?"

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Jeff Stern | Online Editor-in-Chief

Ban on use of handheld phones while driving possible

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concerned, I think a ban needs to be done because at home, before the ban was enforced, people were not taking it that seriously because you would just get a ticket and then sign off by paying a fine," Edwards said. "But, after the ban was enforced, you saw a lot of changes. I think that it's just a little thing, so why don't people wait until they get home or get to somewhere safe instead of endangering themselves and other people?"

Edwards said New Jersey's ban was passed before she began driving, so its enforcement was never debatable when she got her license. Her older brother experienced the transitional period before and after the ban, she said North Carolina residents could benefit just as he did.

"The ban was before I started driving because I'm only 19, but my older brother drove before the ban was enforced," she said. "But after, he could see why it was that much more important because kids would get into accidents in the parking lot just from talking on their cell phones."

these states prohibit drivers from using handheld cell phones while driving.

*Maryland - all laws are primary enforcement, an officer may cite a driver for using a handheld cell phone without any other traffic offense taking place.



LUKE LOVETT | Graphics Editor

Town begins construction

CONSTRUCTION from PAGE 1

new project will enhance the Town of Elon.

"Anything that generates retail sales, we get some retail tax off of that," he said. "It's not tremendously significant, but it will help try to get the town more well rounded."

Construction on East Haggard also demonstrates the collaboration between the town and the university.

"On East Haggard some of (the projects) are university funded and the others are joint projects involving the university and other people," Dula said. "The sidewalk is a three partner project with the town, the university and the North Carolina Department of Transportation."

Dula predicts that the project will be completed by the end of the summer.

A sidewalk project along East Haggard would extend the sidewalk to Gilliam Road, in turn passing the new Gerald L. Francis Center, which will serve as the home of the physical therapy and physician assistant program.

The Town of Elon has had its own construction projects, too, including the addition to Elon Community Church and the widening of Cook Road, which, although not a university project, also influences students in addition to Elon residents.

"One of the main reasons for the Cook Road project was to create heavy traffic off Williamson Avenue," Tolley said.

Cook Road, which is off University Drive, will be expanded to four lanes. The project involves an expansion of the railroad tracks and the installation of a ramp.

"You don't have that big traffic coming down the middle of the town," he said, "and, of course, with all the students it's good to take that traffic off."

The widening of Cook Road is part of the state thoroughfare plan, and will develop a road connecting the more used roads, such as I-85, I-40 and NC-70.

"It will take traffic around the urban areas instead of through the urban areas," Dula said.

Despite the number of construction projects, Tolley doubts the construction will disrupt the functionality of the town.

"It's a lot of building," he said, "but each building area is just so focused."

Still, Tolley identified parking and traffic as a concern until the construction of the buildings and roads is complete.

"Any time you build something it's going to have an impact on what was there before, but it's a normal impact," Dula said.