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Neutrality is negativity: LGBTQ community says Elon student body is apathetic to cause



Kassondra Cloos
News Editor

Among Elon University's many commitments to greater success and diversity as an institution, efforts to expand and improve the experiences of LGBTQ students are a priority for many students, faculty and staff. But despite continued work to increase awareness of LGBTQ issues on campus, many say the Elon community as a whole remains apathetic to the cause.

"It's neutral but that neutrality is perceived as negative by the LGBTQ community," said junior Jess McDonald, president of SPECTRUM and a Lumen Scholar researching the history of LGBTQ student organizations on college campuses. "The university isn't supporting that kind of diversity."

Richard Baker, assistant director for Residence Life, minored in LGBT studies as an undergraduate and said he has seen much more open support for LGBTQ students on other college campuses.

"At every campus I've been a part of, I've seen more obvious symbols of LGBTQ pride and support," he said. "It's different being on a campus that is so obviously heterosexual and I think that can wear on you after a while."

Opressive language

There are few overt signs of homophobia on Elon's campus, Baker said, but more people should step up to interrupt more subtle messages of hate, such as language used in jest that has the potential to be offensive.

Sophomore Ben Poole said his friends were extremely supportive of him when he came out to them during Winter Term of his freshmen year, but the casual use of "gay" as a synonym for "stupid" is one that significantly impacts his perception of people.

"When you're in a situation where there's mostly men, you know there's going to be jokes like 'that's so gay,'" he said. "It makes me feel a little uncomfortable. It makes me not want to tell them as much, or get as close to them."

Simply promoting tolerance of the LGBTQ community is a step, said Ann Cahill, chair of the philosophy department, but should not be the ultimate goal. Society should work toward recognition and appreciation of gender identity and sexual orientation diversity, she said.

See LGBTQ | PAGE 4

TRACY RAETZ | Staff Photographer
Drag Queen Shirli Stevez was the emcee for the drag show hosted by Spectrum. The event was the culminating point for Pride Week festivities.

Elon to test emergency response system this fall

Eva Hill
Copy Chief

Elon University administrators are planning routine emergency notification tests once a semester during College Coffee starting next fall. The planned tests stemmed from technological problems with the university's text messaging system during the tornado warning April 5, according to Chris Fulkerson, assistant vice president for technology.

"We had a delay in the text messaging we sent out," Fulkerson said. "If we test the system on a regular basis, we would catch these problems. We agreed to test once a semester during College Coffee, so we can publicize that this is just a test and everyone will know about it."

Sirens, television and computer screens, and phone systems are among the forms of communication that will be tested during the drills, according to Smith Jackson, vice president and dean of Student Life.

"We can find kinks in the system, and we found that some of the cell phone companies had to make correction in their systems because the messages were delayed so it has to integrate back into our system," he said. "So we need to do this every semester to make sure."

There are two sirens, one on Alumni Gym and one on East Gym, and they are used to notify students in the event of an emergency. The sirens were installed about three years ago and have been used and tested, Jackson said.

He said the university also uses E-Alert, a notification system powered by Omnilert, to send urgent news to cell phones. Omnilert recently had to make corrections to its system because the messages were delayed, according to Fulkerson.

Some SMS messages destined for major carriers experienced a delay of 10 minutes or longer after the tornado warning April 5, and a significant portion was delivered late, according to Scott Howard, Omnilert, LLC.

"The gateway engineers at Air2Web are taking steps to regularly optimize the routing database and reviewing the practices on how often this must be performed," Howard said. "Omnilert has been informed that this issue will not recur as measures are now in place to detect database issues

like this before they cause delays in the SMS delivery chain."

Jackson said the administration's next step is to hardwire E-Alert and the siren system so the two notification processes will be initiated and emitted simultaneously.

"We have 3,216 people who use E-Alert, and that's a pretty good number," Jackson said. "But if you're not on it, you won't get it."

Fulkerson said the text messages sent out during the tornado warning April 16 went through much faster, and most people received the message in less than one minute. The sirens were also set off, and an "all clear"

See EMERGENCY | PAGE 3

