

Elon students prepare to Occupy Wall Street

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News Editor

Maggie Castor is hoping for the best, but preparing for the worst.

"The chances are slim that one of us would experience something like this, but if I did get Maced on camera, the conversations that it could spark would be worth the pain of being Maced," she said.

The Elon University senior is one of a group of students who is planning to caravan to New York City this weekend to participate in Occupy Wall Street demonstrations centered in the city's Zuccotti Park but quickly popping up in locations around the country. The loosely organized movement is employing tactics similar to those from the Arab Spring uprisings to draw attention to corporate greed and economic inequality.

"We are the 99 percent that will no longer tolerate the greed and corruption of the 1 percent," Occupy Wall Street's website reads.

For junior Lauren Clapp, who is also joining Elon's caravan, each participant in the demonstrations has his or her own personal reason for going.

"I personally get really frustrated with the fact that I don't feel like we live in a real democracy," she said. "Corruption and money are in our government and Wall Street is in our government. It's a really great, inspiring way to raise awareness and change it."

Being in the 99 percent is the uniting factor for Castor and many other protesters who stand against the 1 percent of people who have the most wealth. She said she is particularly concerned with the increasing burden of student loans.

"I just don't think we really see this type of action and people uniting in this way across differences that often in the United States," Castor said. "To be able to have that experience of direct democracy, it's not an opportunity that comes around very often."

Numerous media reports have characterized the structure of the protests as having the feel of a festival. Three meals are served a day through donations and, according to Castor, daily general assembly meetings are used to prepare

declarations of the protester's demands. Workshops, a public library and a talent show have also reportedly taken place.

"It's similar to a festival atmosphere with strong political dynamics to it, as well," Castor said. "It's really important that politics isn't something that is an aspect of our life that we isolate. I'm really happy to see this as a movement that integrates the community and politics and recognizes how these factors impact all areas of our life."

Preliminary discussion of the Elon students' involvement has included preparations for the tense environment they will be entering, including first aid kits and facemasks to guard against pepper spray.

"There hasn't been this big kind of a sustained protest in quite some time," Castor said. "It's not unsafe, but it's a little bit of a precarious situation."

While interactions between police and protesters on an individual level have been relatively peaceful, Castor said the actions of the police change in response to large groups. There is some controversy surrounding an Oct. 1 march on Brooklyn Bridge, with some videos purporting to show police leading the protesters onto the bridge before subsequently arresting them.

Thus far, mainstream media coverage has been minimal. Castor, a self-described activist, said she was surprised she did not hear about the movement until it had entered its 10th day. What has been covered, she said, are instances of police brutality.

"It's an interesting scenario that we're in such a situation where the media is not wanting to talk, for whatever reason, about Occupy Wall Street," she said. "But we're in a position where they have to talk about it in some way. If we try to ignore what's happening, the only distractions we come up with are also really crucial issues."

Reports of the atmosphere in New York City have only intensified Clapp's desire to get involved.

"To see that many people involved, it made me so excited to go and be a part of the crowd with people who feel so passionately about something that they don't care if they're going to get arrested,"



The Occupy Wall Street demonstrations have not been extensively followed by the mass media.

she said.

But the passion enveloping parts of the world has yet to be grasped on Elon's campus, according to Clapp and Castor.

"I think it's safe to make the generalization that a lot of Elon students are comfortable economically, though not all," Castor said. "So it may not be something on their radar immediately. If it continues to grow, I don't know how Elon would respond."

Castor predicts some collaboration between the protests and the Elon-centered Not on our Campus movement, both of which address issues of equality.

"I think since it's not something so immediate it may not affect most Elon students, that's why (most of us) are not talking about it yet," she said. "It may be too soon to see if Elon students will talk about it."

While the exact impact of the movement has yet to be determined, Clapp said the situation cannot keep escalating as it has without some sort of direct result.

"I'm not sure if it will be change like in Egypt or a smaller scale change," she said. "There have been lots of conversations



Many protesters are middle-class Americans.

with friends and learning from them and their perspectives. Without this going on, I wouldn't be having those conversations."

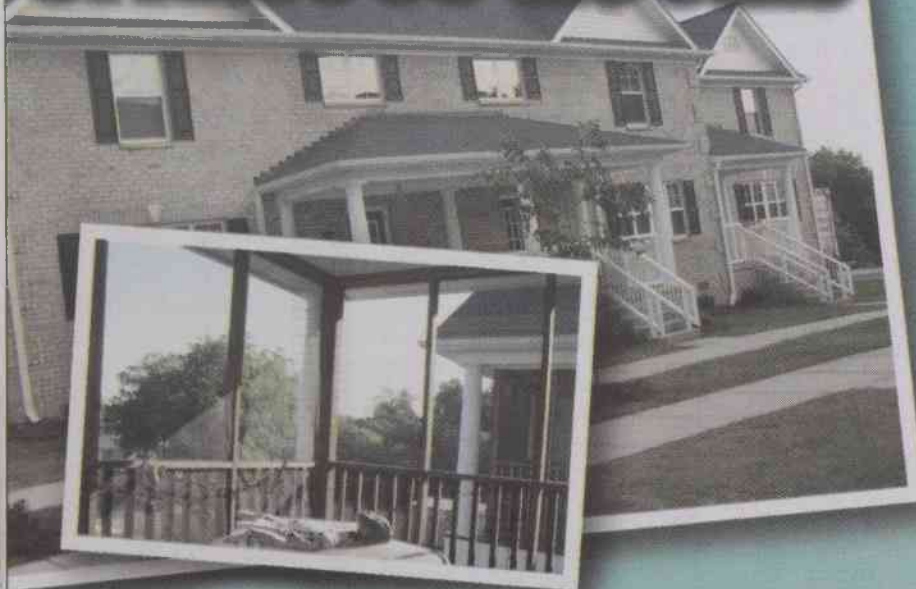
Even a single reform would be enough for Castor.

"I would like to see reform with student loans, a repeal on the rule that corporations are people," Castor said. "Even if it didn't meet all of the demands, that would be a tremendous feat."

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