



JULIA SAYERS | Staff Photographer

El Centro offers free Spanish conversation classes, cultural experiences and plane tickets in exchange for 140 hours logged within the center. Native speakers work in the center and many praise its effectiveness.

Despite El Centro's success, demand for more language centers is low

Natalie Allison
Senior Reporter

Every weekday at Elon, Carlton 114 is buzzing with people speaking Spanish. El Centro de Espanol, Elon's only language center, serves as both a home for native Spanish speakers at the university and a place for students of the language to come and practice their conversational skills and learn about Hispanic culture.

When El Centro was established 13 years ago, Elon students weren't required to take a foreign language. But now that the foreign language requirement has been implemented at Elon, students have more options and are trying out classes like Arabic and Mandarin Chinese — but there's no language center comparable to El Centro, where they can practice speaking and learn about the culture from natives.

"The whole dynamic of El Centro is different (from the classroom)," said Sylvia Munoz, director of El Centro. "You can't really teach any foreign language apart from the culture. Language is part of the culture or culture is part of the language. Any way you want to see it."

Although Munoz said she firmly believes the only way to effectively learn a language is to be around native speakers and be immersed in the culture, the possibility of building centers for less spoken languages at

Elon seems unrealistic.

"I would love if they could have places like this for every single language," she said. "But I do realize that the university has to put a lot of effort and money into a place like this, and the only way it has been able to survive is the numbers. If there's not enough demand to justify expenses, then they're not going to be able to do it."

Woody Pelton, dean of international programs, said there have been conversations about creating other language centers at the university, but no plans would be in place for such establishments without significant student demand.

"I don't know that we would ever be able to replicate El Centro for the different languages on campus," he said. "I just don't think that's feasible. But we do want to be supportive of other languages."

Pelton said organizations, conversation tables and other outlets are all available for students studying various languages at Elon. But, there are currently no other programs that offer incentives for students who spend a large amount of time learning about the language outside of class, as El Centro does. Students who log 140 hours in El Centro during a span of two years earn a free plane ticket to a Spanish-speaking country.

Beyond the incentive of earning transportation to experience Hispanic culture

firsthand, some students say they believe that time spent at El Centro, and being around natives so often, improved their speaking abilities and taught them more about the culture than what could be learned in a textbook.

"I think what helps El Centro succeed so much is the fact there's a pretty respectable population of native speakers who come here," said junior Anthony Phillips-Spencer. "I don't know if there are that many natives for other languages at Elon."

George Guerrero, a freshman from the Dominican Republic, said the 13 or 14 native Spanish speakers who spend a good deal of time at El Centro find solace in having a place where they can share commonalities with other Latinos.

"We feel like a family," Guerrero said. "This is a place where we can share our culture and tell people who we are."

Though no goals for additional language centers have been proposed, Pelton said the university's plans for the future could affect the decision. The possibility of new general studies requirements increasing the level of foreign language students are required to take, as well as the prospect of the International Centre moving to the Global Neighborhood in North campus, could play a role in whether additional language centers should be established.

Plan to increase campus diversity still in early stages

Hannah DelaCourt
Senior Reporter

One of Elon University's most emphasized priorities is establishing a diversity plan, which is currently in its earliest stages after a summer committee of the Presidential Diversity Council and senior staff members worked to write the first drafts.

The plan will essentially expand on the first theme of the "Elon Commitment, which is an unprecedented commitment to diversity and global engagement."

Brooke Barnett, the senior fellow for diversity and global engagement in the Office of the President, said she and President Leo Lambert have shared the plan with academic and staff councils and will begin to get feedback

from other groups on campus throughout the fall.

"This plan builds on Elon's longstanding commitment to community and creating a community that warmly welcomes all fully into the life of the university," she said.

While the plan is not fully in place yet, Kenn Gaither, associate dean of the School of Communications and a member of the Presidential Diversity Council, said a number of initiatives are underway and some are already in practice.

As part of the plan, the council is not only looking at what other institutions have done, but what it needs to do to

increase diversity and ensure it is diffused throughout the Elon experience. One way the council is doing this is through research, surveys and focus groups in order to help them find out what the experience is like for an Elon student.

But Gaither said they are looking at diversity in a broad term.

"It's not just a black and white issue," he said. "It's about students who are underrepresented at Elon, like students with different

religious backgrounds, students with disabilities and first-generation college students. We are looking broadly at all of these to make the best experience we can."

-Kenn Gaither
MEMBER OF THE
PRESIDENTIAL DIVERSITY
COUNCIL

Gaither also stressed that the plan cannot work solely from the top down, but it has to be something that involves the whole community.

The council encourages all faculty, staff and students to get involved in the discussions that will be held in the upcoming year. Even though the discussion topics may be challenging, they are important in moving forward because diversity is such an important part of being an Elon student, according to Gaither.

"Diversity is tied to a worldview when lenses are wide enough to understand and appreciate differences, and that is a fundamental part of the Elon education," he said.

Mind the Gap: Administration aims to increase study abroad participation

Strategic Plan focuses on global engagement, access for 100 percent of students to gain international experience

Rebecca Smith
Managing Editor

"Why did you not study abroad?" This is a question that is being asked by many members of administration of the students who have not done either a winter term or semester abroad during their four years at Elon University.

The first point of the Elon Commitment is "an unprecedented university commitment to diversity and global engagement." The administration is aiming for 100 percent of students to have the opportunity to travel abroad during their studies and experience life immersed in a new culture.

"We all believe study abroad is very valuable," said Woody Pelton, dean of international programs and director of the Isabella Cannon International Centre. "Students who go abroad come back as changed for the better. It's important to gain that experience."

Seventy-eight and one half percent of the Class of 2011 studied abroad and this is typical of other recent classes, as well.

One of the hurdles that exists for the remaining 28.5 percent of students is money. The International Centre is trying to reduce the cost of study abroad, but there are limits because of

the cost of quality academics, housing and transportation.

"We are looking to create more scholarships, but we're not the only group on campus trying to raise funds,"

Pelton said. "We are trying to collaborate with the advancement office to find additional support."

The current scholarships are enough to help someone if they have almost enough funds, but not students who do not have any money for study abroad,

Pelton said. The International Centre sometimes encourages studying abroad for a semester because it is less expensive than Winter Term programs.

The students who are less likely to study abroad are males, athletes, residents of North Carolina, participants in Greek Life, minorities and students from certain disciplines, like performing arts, according to Connie Book, associate provost for

Academic Affairs.

The International Centre is working with these academic departments, athletics, the office of Greek Life and the Multicultural Center to find out

"We want to identify all of these different reasons, so then we can try and help as many students study abroad as possible. It makes for a stronger student body and a more global community."

-Woody Pelton
DIRECTOR OF ISABELLA CANNON
INTERNATIONAL CENTER

when the best time is for these students to study abroad and what obstacles they may have that would impede the feasibility of going abroad.

"Students who are in the musical theatre program are more likely to not study abroad," Pelton said. "They are always auditioning for or performing in a production during the semester."

There are also opportunities to study abroad in the summer and during Winter Term. But musical theatre students tend to try and get professional experience during those times, Book said.

The administration is still trying to figure out why males do not study abroad as much.

"In focus groups, males have commented that they wanted it to count

toward their professional experience," Book said. "If they just think about it as enrichment in culture, then they won't be as engaged."

The trends that have been found for not studying abroad during these focus groups reflect national trends, Pelton said, including that student athletes do not have time to study abroad in their schedules.

"With student athletes it is a challenge and we are sympathetic," Pelton said. "What we're trying to do is work with the Athletic Department to try and determine what time of year is best. Maybe we will create a program for, say, baseball. Since athletes tend to be committed for most of the year, they might need their own program."

The International Centre is also following the new general studies program closely because the study abroad courses might meet those requirements, Pelton said.

A survey will be sent out in the next few weeks for students in the Class of 2012 who have never studied abroad, to find out their reasons for not studying abroad.

"We want to identify all of these different reasons, so then we can try and help as many students study abroad as possible," Pelton said. "It makes for a stronger student body and a more global community."