

Elon's intellectual climate

given some thought to a specific topic. But when comparing the end results, there's no disparity.

"When students come to me, they're interested in research," Miller said. "On an individual level, I don't know if I notice that much of a difference. If you're in a Fellows program, you know that others in your class are going through this process at the same time, as opposed to a non-Fellow who may not be going through the same process."

This overlap, Miller said, serves to enhance the intellectual climate at Elon because discussion is generated both inside and outside the Fellows programs. Having solid intellect, he argues, stems from the ability to ask appropriate questions — a skill that research serves to impart.

"It comes from research," Miller said. "People get excited because they put a lot of work and energy into their research. That's the way we engage the community."

Engagement among students in Fellows programs and those who are not is a crucial portion of Elon's intellectual climate, according to Honors Program Director Tom Mould. Fellows students are selected to be models across campus, hoping they'll lead the charge toward a robust intellectual climate — not comprise it wholly.

While Fellows programs aim to recruit stronger students, they comprise but a small portion of Elon's intellectual sphere.

There are approximately 800 Fellows total. They make up about 14 percent of Elon's student body.

"There's space for everyone," Mould said. "It's not just the Fellows students who are going to be leaders in the intellectual climate."

Fellows falling short

But the Fellows programs at Elon have not supported all recipients equally. Senior College Fellow Julie Crothers felt neglected as a dance major. She benefitted from her scholarship, she said, but was uninspired by the other aspects of the Fellows protocol.

In her freshman year, the prospect of dance research was unfamiliar and intimidat-



Julie Crothers, a senior College Fellow and dance major, said some of the requirements for Fellows are not geared toward majors in the arts.

CAROLINE OLNEY | Photo Editor

ing. Academic requirements, like the mandatory structural analysis, literature review and poster session, seemed irrelevant to her field of study.

"For all the artsy folks, it's more difficult to make sense of things you do," she said. "They teach you how to ask good research questions. As a dancer, I didn't know how it made any sense at all, and I didn't have much help with that for a while."

The unanswered questions and frustration Crothers initially experienced were answered eventually. She said she's grateful, ultimately, for the opportunity to complete a large-scale project independently.

But Crothers admitted she doesn't consider herself a typical Fellow. Opting out of the College Fellows shared housing, Crothers aspired toward a more generic college experience — only interacting with the other Fellows in her Fellows-only classes.

"I considered dropping right after my

sophomore year," Crothers said. "For two whole years I thought it was stupid. But it was worth it to stay. They were paying me a little bit of money, and I didn't want to lose that."

For other students in the Fellows programs, the academic rigor was a tall order, especially on top of the other requirements. Former Leadership Fellow Will Stirn placed an enormous value on his time in the Fellows program. But, he said, he felt that in a program that emphasized leadership, academics were placed on a pedestal. Unable to meet the 3.0 grade point average benchmark, Stirn was cut from the program.

According to Stirn, the homogenized nature of all the Fellows compromised his experience. Being held to a specific academic standard was not constructive for Stirn.

"My biggest confusion with the academia of the program is where they have this standard, even if someone is excelling in every

other aspect of the program," he said. "I didn't think that standard was fair for Leadership Fellows because leadership is such a gray matter issue."

Knowing that each student has a different background with leadership and learns differently, Stirn said leadership education is a process that requires practice and failure, unlike math or science, where the answers consistently rely on formulas and precise calculations.

Eager about pursuing a career in outdoor education, Stirn's leadership education will play a defining role in his life after college. Learning alongside the Leadership Fellows, he said, could have been instrumental.

"There are some people who do the minimum requirements to get by in Fellows," Stirn said. "It makes for a weird situation because some of us were dropped because of standardized policies but were super involved in the program."