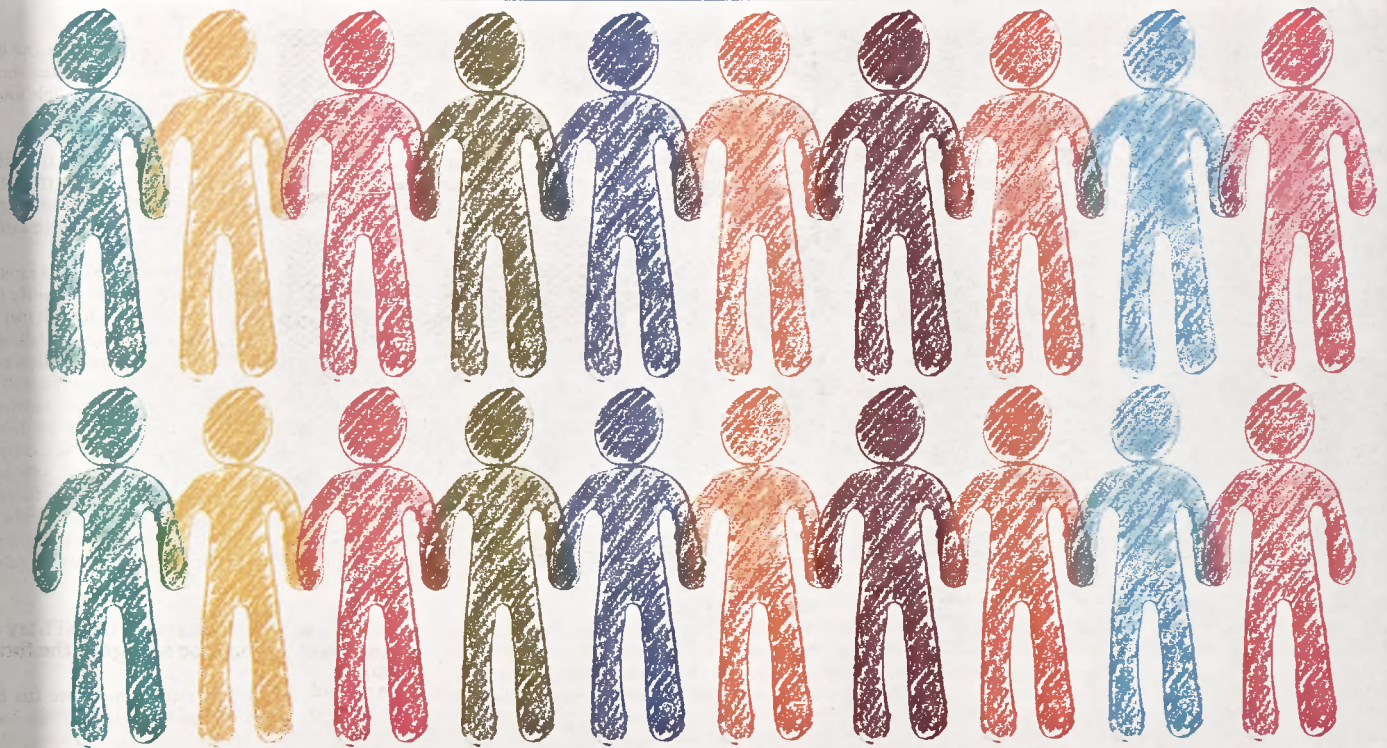


OPINIONS



ELENA HERNANDEZ | DESIGNER

STAFF EDITORIAL

Discrimination accusations show need for reflection

HOW WE SEE IT

Recent accusations of racial discrimination from a former professor shows a need for open conversations on microaggressions.

In January 2017, former assistant professor Michael Rodriguez filed a lawsuit against Elon University for two counts of discrimination. In the year that has followed, this lawsuit has seemingly been swept under the rug, with Elon requesting the case be dismissed because Rodriguez did not, among other reasons, file an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission claim within the statute of limitations. The university denies all allegations of discrimination, and at the time the lawsuit was filed, issued a statement reaffirming Elon's

stance against discrimination.

Now, more than a year later, Rodriguez has a 2,270 page response to Elon's request to dismiss the case. In his response, he cited votes from the promotions and tenure committee, as well as reviews and praises from colleagues and supervisors.

Whether Rodriguez's claims of discrimination are proven in court, this lawsuit shows a dire need for more open conversations on subtle or subconscious ways people discriminate. Though it may be hard to admit, we live

in a society where we are taught racism and prejudice from an early age. Because of this, we often must actively try to unlearn this behavior to treat people more equally.

The faculty and staff members named in Rodriguez's suit may not have maliciously, or even consciously discriminated against him, but the claims made in his response give reason to investigate. Discrimination and prejudice is not always outright in forms of racial slurs or exclusion, but can also be more subtle, such as denying a well-deserved promotion.

The Elon community should continue to take Rodriguez's claims seriously and use this incident as a time to reflect on ways we may unintentionally discriminate against others.

The community should open up more conversations on this incident and fight to ensure that even accusations of discrimination should be a cause for concern.

If there is any evidence at all that points to discrimination of any kind, it should be investigated. Incidents like this deserve to be critically looked at.

We understand that Elon is thinking logically from a legal standpoint for wanting the case dismissed. If it did not happen, then legal proceedings may be a waste of time, in their eyes.

But this case is a lesson to us all. Even subtle acts can be viewed as discrimination. And as a university community, we need to ensure we are mindful of this.

CAMPUS VOICES

Harmful jokes about mental illnesses need to stop



Tara DeAngelis

At least 1 in 5 college students battle a diagnosable mental illness (NAMI, 2018). This challenge affects millions of people across the world. Mental illness is certainly not a laughing matter or something to take lightly. Unfortunately, mental illness can lead to suicide, serious physical injuries, life-threatening medical problems and intense emotional pain. This pain is intensified when peers make jokes about mental illness — and these jokes have made their way to Elon University.

As a teenager, I faced a variety of mental health issues. I battled anorexia nervosa, which led to many hospitalizations and some near-death encounters, as well as panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder and depression. Throughout my experiences in treatment for my mental illnesses, I met individuals with post-traumatic stress

disorder, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, self-harm addictions, alcoholism, drug addictions and countless others. I realized how prevalent mental illness was, and I became acutely aware of insensitive comments regarding these disorders.

My sensitivity prevailed and even grew deeper as I have been progressing through my time at Elon. While I found incredible support and a welcoming environment here, I couldn't help but notice my peers making hurtful comments. These comments were not directed at me, but hearing things like, "I skipped lunch, I'm so anorexic," and "I got PTSD from that test, it was so hard," cut deeply. After my time in treatment, I knew the pain that anorexia and PTSD cause to many, and I did not think these "jokes" were funny.

"While I realize that many

people may be unaware that they are making these 'jokes,' it is still important people understand the offensive and harmful effects they have that might affect others," sophomore Rachel LeFrock said. "I have witnessed this on campus often and I personally admit that I may have engaged in this type of behavior. I strongly believe something should change."

Sadly, many Elon students silently battle mental illness and endure these insensitive jokes almost daily. With the recent suicide of our own Harrison Durant, I thought the jokes would lighten up and eventually disappear completely. But I continued to hear peers say, "Ugh I have so much work to do, I'm going to kill myself." This shocked me. We lost a student to suicide and yet students still joke about taking their own lives.

With this recent tragedy,

I felt the need to stand up for those battling mental illness and start the conversation about why the previously mentioned jokes are hurtful. I wrote an article for my eating disorder recovery blog, *Honestly Free[ed]*. The post, "5 Jokes About Mental Health That Need To Stop," was written from a place of love and a genuine desire to make the Elon community a more comfortable place for students battling mental illness.

I am writing now with the same intentions. I don't wish to point fingers or accuse any student, and I do not intend to blame Elon University in any way. I think Elon is unique in that the culture here is friendly and inviting, with students and faculty continuously striving to do the next right thing.

I am sharing my message here with the hopes that we can come together as a cam-

pus to support one another and treat each and every person with compassion. I know jokes about mental illnesses usually do not come from a place of wanting to hurt another person, and in fact are not given a lot of thought. I strive to change this — I encourage students to think before they make a joke, to ask, "Does what I'm about to say make light of another person's serious pain?" The general rule of thumb is that if you would not joke about a debilitating physical illness, you should not joke about a mental illness.

I believe that Elon's student body can continue to grow and create a warm, welcoming environment for all. I sincerely hope that those who read this article will take action to end the "jokes" and that students will feel safe enough to call out their friends if necessary. Together, we can be the change.