The Pendulum: A Daily News Operation of Elon University

To the girl standing outside Freshii with a bindi on the side of your forehead: I’m truly sorry for stating that. I was just trying to graduate of the bindi, an item I’d watch my mother cautiously place on the very middle of her forehead with calculated precision, traveled to the side of your head by accident. Perhaps you wore it on the side while walking?

Perhaps it slid down to the left as the day progressed and you had no time to adjust it?

But then you reached across and patted the bindi down — still displaced on the side of your forehead — and I couldn’t continue making excuses for you.

To the girl standing outside Freshii with a bindi on the side of your forehead: I didn’t say anything out loud, but you made me angry.

Looking at you made me recall all those mornings I would spend over the school sink rigorously scraping the tikka or red rice paste — essentially the non-sticker form of the bindi — off my forehead because my classmates would taunt me with remarks like, “Look, she’s bleeding from the forehead.”

Practicing my own culture meant having to deal with the bullying. It meant internalizing the stares, giggles and pointing. But the element of my culture that once singled me out for being “too foreign” or art on the side of your forehead as something edgy, exotic and desirable.

As we’ve heard over and over again, there’s a fine line between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation. But do we hear it enough?

Appropriation is theft. It’s when, last year, a sorority at Elon University decided it would somehow be culturally appropriating a concept with headbands, feathers, Native American symbols and designs without making any reference to the culture they were seemingly exploiting and stereotyping for their own opportunities. Appropriation is denying history. It’s buying an Indian mandala tapestry — a Buddhist and Hindu symbol of interconnectedness and unity — from a “boho store,” hanging it on your wall to “add color to your room” and describing it as “hippie” — a term that silences and denies the extensive history behind the art form and does not do justice to its origins.

Appropriation is the intentional topling of power structures and dynamics in a conversation. It’s a mutual exchange. It’s admiring ignorance, recognizing privilege and exhibiting respect for diversity. It’s a question constructed in a way that doesn’t take ownership of the culture you’re choosing to celebrate or learn more about. It’s asking and researching before wearing.

Love” epiphany and constantly tell your friends, “My heart never left ______.” Appropriation is also taking a stand. It’s calling out those who appropriate and it’s questioning social norms that play on cultural traditions that aren’t your own. It’s saying, “No, you can’t just ask any patterns of colorful geometric shapes ‘tribal print.’” It’s asking, “Hey, before you don those cornrows, maybe think about the cultural double-standards black women face for doing the same?”

The primary difference between the two? Research, respect and an educated decision on whether the use of cultural appropriation is working to educate new students or providing them with information so they can be more knowledgeable and aware as they join organizations.

Students haze other students. It’s a student problem, and it’s up to students to end it. The Hazing Prevention Coalition is approaching hazing from a preventative standpoint that seeks to stop hazing before it starts. To do this, the Coalition is working to educate new students before they get involved with organizations so they know how to identify hazing if or when it happens and where to go to find help.

I think reactionary responses have been more prevalent, both at Elon and at other institutions,” Carnes said.

“But from a preventative standpoint, we’re hoping that, with all these new students who just joined however many organizations you sign up for at Org Fair, that we’re preparing them with the awareness and the knowledge and information so they can be more knowledgeable and aware as they join organizations and do something within fraternities and sororities.”

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As part of ongoing efforts to end hazing at Elon University, the recently established Hazing Prevention Coalition organized events last week to participate in National Hazing Prevention Week (NHPW). The Coalition has brought new energy to the fight against hazing at Elon, but there is still a long way to go.

The Coalition can’t do anything without student cooperation. Students know hazing is happening. They take part in it, watch it and are affected by it.

But many do nothing to end it. Some students don’t recognize certain activities as hazing — others don’t care.

Either way, university administration can’t do anything unless the student body shares its commitment to end hazing.

Last week’s NHPW events, as part of national efforts to raise awareness of, educate about and prevent hazing, were a cornerstone of the Coalition’s first campus-wide initiative. The events and activities including an informational table at College Coffee Sept. 29 and a workshop for advisers of student organizations. They are just the beginning of a new era of hazing prevention at Elon.

The Coalition — established last summer — is a group of

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Why the rubric shouldn’t be your best friend

The second week of classes at Elon University hasn’t ended yet, but most upperclassmen’s calendars have already started to fill. Soon, new students’ schedules will be equally crammed.

Students come to Elon to earn a degree, but they stay because of their commitment to student organizations. A quick glance over their class schedules may show that they have occupied the hours not spent in class. Participation in student organizations has become such a major part of Elon campus life that it has created an atmosphere of over-commitment in which students are pressured to join any and all organizations that match their interests, often to the detriment of their academic performance and general well-being.

The solution to this problem isn’t committing to nothing. Student organizations enrich the college experience and nurture passions that can develop into careers. Involvement in them teaches students how to be responsible adults and how to function outside their comfort zones.

Involving fully, or as fully as possible while balancing academic and personal commitments, increases student fulfillment and allows students to truly invest themselves in groups they are passionate about. When students have too many commitments, they struggle to balance all of them and are often unable to devote the appropriate amount of time to each. This is when students are forced to become members in name only, not for lack of passion but for lack of time.

This Friday, representatives of 240 of Elon’s student groups will arrange tables around Young Commons, all hoping to entice students, new and old, into joining. The resulting chaos — the Organization Fair — is more affectionately referred to as the Org Fair — is new students’ first opportunity to sign up to learn more about student groups. It is also new students’ first introduction to over-commitment at Elon.

Janis Baughman, director of student activities, said the atmosphere of over-engagement comes from the students Elon attracts, students who were highly involved in high school. The university’s job, she said, is to offer students the opportunities they want when it comes to student organizations.

Thanks to their efforts and the efforts of other students, at Elon students don’t have to look hard to find an organization that fits their needs. Instead, the opposite is true: Elon offers such a variety of organizations that students can pick and choose what they do and don’t want to take part in.

But in Elon’s atmosphere of over-commitment, many students struggle to be picky and, rather than choosing only the organizations that most interest them, join multiple. And the Org Fair allows them to do that right from the start.

Collectively, membership in student groups across campus totals 12,000, Baughman said. With approximately 5,800 undergraduate students on campus, means the majority of students are involved in more than one organization, which points to students’ time management skills and eagerness to be involved.

Of course, there are no statistics to measure the extent to which students are involved in their organizations. So at this year’s Org Fair, whether you’re a new student searching for an organization to devote yourself to or a returning student looking to get more involved, take stock of what you’re really interested in and what you can handle. Do some research before you go so you know which organizations to look for and which you want to prioritize.

If you deeply invest yourself in a select handful of organizations, your Elon experience and your choice organizations will all be the better for it.

Learning beyond 5 little letters

Why the rubric shouldn’t be your best friend

The first assignment I had to complete for one of my classes this year almost gave me a panic attack. The demands for the piece — worth 15 percent of my final grade — were frighteningly minimal. They simply asked, “Tell me more about yourself.”

No rubric, no word count, no grading scale and no real writing prompt. What a nightmare.

I was stumped. There had to be a catch, right? It had to be at least 1,000 words, right? Or something?

I labored over this piece, questioning every word I included and crafting my professor for nothing. I was exacting all that he wanted: “Ugh, too many verb-to-be verbs. This is way too easy. Let’s add a fancy synonym there. Ooh, the semicolon — professors love that.”

Too many hours later, I looked down at the piece that I had spent so much time laboring over. I was stumped. There had to be a catch, right? It had to be at least 1,000 words, right? Or something?

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And I know it’s not just me. Too many students, said the atmosphere of over-engagement comes from the students Elon attracts, students who were highly involved in high school. The university’s job, she said, is to offer students the opportunities they want when it comes to student organizations.

During my Winter Term program last year, our professor told us she would grade us on the number of questions we would ask presenters during site visits. As you’d probably imagine, all presentations we attended began the same way, “Hi, I’m John Doe from so and so and …” Before he could finish, ten hands would fly in the air and the generic, pre-prepared questions that we probably pulled from college applications would ensue. “What do you like about your job? What are some of your life’s greatest challenges? What’s your biggest regret?”

In contrary to what we’d like to believe, many Elon University professors don’t give us concrete guidelines not because they’re lazy but because they just want us to think. Rather than begging for recipes to get As and Bs, just write. Chances are, the less you ask yourself, “What does my professor want me to write?” and the more you ask, “What do I want to write?” the more you’ll end up learning.

We pay a whole lot of money to attend this school, and it’s painful to think that many of us — myself included — have to remind each other that we attend this institution to learn, not to regurgitate facts, write robotic essays and research the easiest A-granting topic.

Chances are, I’ll get a C for the tell-me-about-yourself paper. And that’s fine, because I learned something.

To create means that a part of you is invested in the final product — not the final grade. My paper may no longer be a crayon, but I’m going to spend the rest of my academic career focusing less about grades and venturing outside lines and rubrics. Color with me?
The past few days have broken those in the Nepali diaspora in ways that I can’t quite articulate.

We have spent hours clutching digital screens, desperately dialing numbers, finding hints of solace in something as simple as a “Share” button and feeling utterly impotent and useless. As we continue to wait for word from loved ones and stare helplessly at messages describing the ongoing suffering and faced by our relatives who have sat outside in the rain consumed by absolute fear of the ground beneath them, we have felt powerless.

But as our brothers and sisters at home dig helplessly at messages as a “share” button and something as simple as a picture shared on your timeline or a heart restore her.

This is more than “global engagement” or anything listed on classroom syllabi or mission statements. This is much, much more than something Smith Jackson said in an email. I’m not asking you to empty your wallets or think and that Nepal deserves your prayer, that Nepal deserves your attention.

This is just an urgent plea, an earnest request for you to recognize that the distance between our homes isn’t as great as you may think and that Nepal deserves your prayer, thought and financial support, in whatever capacity — even when it stops trending on social media.

Please follow Elon For Nepal (#ElonForNe-pal) to find out how to donate in Nepal’s relief efforts and to remain up-to-date with the situation in Nepal even when it stops trending.

Rising from the ashes and the rubble
Sharing the Phoenix spirit with Nepal during its recovery

Leena Dahal Columnist

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Citizens of Nepal work together to clear rubble away after the April 25 earthquake.

Evelyn Farnsworth / The Pendulum

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THE PENDULUM
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The Pendulum seeks to entertain, inform and entertain the Elon community by providing a voice for students and faculty, as well as serve as a forum for the meaningful exchange of ideas.