Discover gems of unexplored community

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ILLUSTRATING THE ISSUES:

*Students are not required to decorate for the video. The administration had hoped for a video that would reflect the diversity of the Elon community, which is reflected in every student. To Elon, diversity means showcasing individuals displaying symbols of each student's culture rather than the life of the Elon student body. There is a focus on the origins of a person rather than the life of the Elon community member.

The increase in international students and a student body that better represents the world's diversity is the first priority in The Elon Commitment. The commitment sites the accomplishments of Laith Najdi '05 of Jordan, a Sundance Film Festival award winner, to explain how the incorporation of 300 "more students like Laith" on Elon's campus "will enrich the experiences of the entire student body." The administration praises him for where he was born rather than his success.

Realistically, yes, the inclusion of more award-winning students will enhance the academic value of the university. Nevertheless, his achievements are derived from his talent, not this ethnicity, and the Elon Commitment again fails to distinguish the individual from the cultural label. As soon as the Elon Commitment and the "Celebration of Lights" video, the administration attempts to define and showcase students and faculty according to their cultural contribution to the university. Until the administration sees beyond the superficial traits that signify diversity, it cannot expect its students to help foster the Elon Commitment's definition of a multicultural society.

Multiculturalism: See beyond the surface

Elon University's administration prides itself on developing a multicultural environment, but is blind to the individuality of each student. The administration means showcasing individuals displaying symbols of their cultural ties rather than unique traits of each student.

University administrators recently produced a video titled "Celebration of Lights," featuring students, faculty and staff of numerous ethnicities, races and religions, to encourage viewers to write on the Elon University Facebook and express gratitude for those who have made an impact on the Elon community.

The video was posted in a public forum and has been produced by those affiliated with Elon. As such, it represents the face of Elon. While we acknowledge that Elon does not solely constitute a white Christian, the video inaccurately portrays the community's population and misrepresents the significance of cultural symbols.

We all remember our favorite jigsaw. Acknowledged or not, our bond with Burlington, whether the city of Burlington, our university represents in the make up our community's view of diversity. While the video may have succeeded in offering diverse, the administration was counterproductive in its efforts.

Essentially, they asked students and faculty to decorate themselves in their culture. The request should have been phrased, "We would like to demonstrate the culture of each individual, please wear an emblem that is significant to you." Instead, they imposed a stereotypical example, promoting a boxed representation of their version of diversity.

Although Anderson said that the video was not intended as a multicultural video, he still wanted viewers to tell "at a glance" that these are people of many different beliefs, talents and all contribute to making us the community that we are. But perhaps it is not possible to present our culture "at a glance." A headshot cannot exemplify culture.

Culture is rooted in tradition and language and beliefs. As a result, we question if multiculturalism is tangible and if Elon should try to make it so.

This is not to say that Elon should not strive for diversity on campus, but in an effort to increase diversity, the administration should not blind itself to the individual and intellectual values of its student body. There is a focus on the origins of a person rather than the life of the Elon community member.

The instance illustrates that video producers intended to present a tangible representation of the administration's view of diversity. While the video may have succeeded in offering diverse, the administration was counterproductive in its efforts.

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ILLUSTRATING THE ISSUES:

These are the human-interest stories that surround us yet often go unnoticed. The employees at local restaurants, shopping malls, movie theaters and banks are quite similar to many individuals in our student community. Global citizenship need not be a difficult commitment to reestablish interaction between people. It may simply be a random chance to speak to someone new, to learn something fascinating about someone we don't know, and attempt to give the same in return. Human connection is identifiable, but is not always pursued. There are ways to become involved in the community around this campus that don't require financial support. Volunteer at the Twin Lakes retirement community and get to know a resident. Invite your waiter to chat on a slow night. Granted, this step outside of one's comfort zone can be a positive experience. But an increased level of understanding between city residents might mean differences in background could lead to a positive outcome years from now. This is here to stay, and so are the people who live around it. Cohabitation in a single geographical location doesn't automatically lead to cohesive. Make an effort.

Leaving a positive mark doesn't just mean leaving a tip on the table. It means leaving an impact in the minds of others and not expecting an impact in the future.

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