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THE PENDULUM

ELON, NORTH CAROLINA | WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2009 | VOLUME 35, EDITION 25

www.elon.edu/pendulum

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THE PENDULUM

Opinions



Robert Wohner
Columnist

What free speech means to Elon

Last week, Elon celebrated First Amendment Day. While it's not a holiday created by Hallmark, for Hallmark (how else do you think America got Valentines Day?), it was marked on campus with its own catchy phrases, compliments of Elon students and staff.

Throughout campus, big, empty white boards were displayed, along with black permanent markers, offering the Elon community a chance to express whatever they wanted. At the end of the day, the boards were filled, and their contents provided an insightful, if slightly distressing, sense of the community's feelings.

Most statements were crude, some were profound and others were catchy. Some gave kudos to Jesus. Others included drawings of marijuana plants. A prize should be awarded to whomever wrote, "When is Second Amendment day?"

Still, one theme spoke the loudest and posed the biggest question. When given a chance to express anything to their fellow Elon students, why did so many choose to write exclusively about sex and drugs?

It's a fair question. In some ways, the Elon community has no problem invoking their right to free speech. When "Save Darfur" is a catchy slogan on an American Apparel T-shirt, Elon students feel comfortable expressing themselves. And whether we'd like to admit it or not, Elon students gave Juicy Campus, the online equivalent of a free speech board, plenty of use. It was easy to wear a "Yes We Can" shirt Nov. 5, and pinning a "110%" button on doesn't cost anyone much.

But these cannot be the extent of our free speech. The willingness to share and express cannot be limited to opening a Twitter account. It involves an understanding of one's convictions. It's the bravery to maintain your core beliefs regardless of political correctness and personal comfort.

One of the most interesting exchanges of the

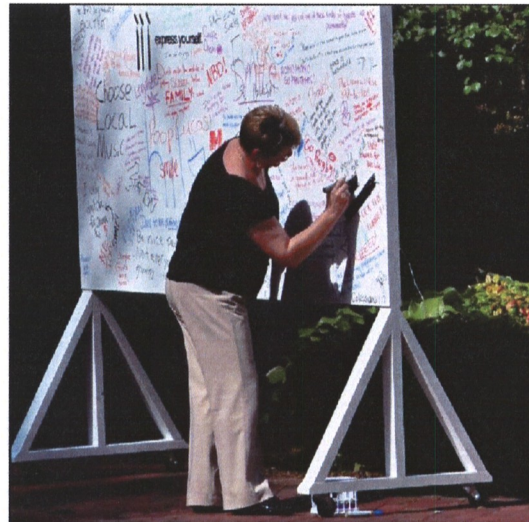


PHOTO SUBMITTED

An ARAMARK employee crosses out a statement related to the company on one of the First Amendment free speech boards last Tuesday.

day occurred when one enthusiastic student decided to scribble away at a "Patriots suck" statement, to include her own homage to Tom Brady. While her passion is duly noted, in her ravage defense of her beloved quarter back, she failed to recognize that while she was expressing herself, she simultaneously silenced the free speech of someone else.

Thankfully, last semester some students organized a protest and respectfully marched to voice their outrage about Town of Elon Police Department. And no less admirably, Elon administration granted them their right to do so. That's free speech, both speaking up and granting the freedom to speak.

Dissent is not the highest form of patriotism. But when it's coupled with relevant speech and action, good things can happen. It is a shame that at a campus as progressive as ours, we've yet to learn the value of challenging assumptions, stepping on some toes, and, as Coldplay front man Chris Martin said, being brave enough to be yourself.