

**SPECIAL  
COLLECTOR'S  
EDITION**

**POINTS OF  
INTEREST**

**Witnesses to history!  
The United States  
elects its first African-  
American President,  
the Democratic Sena-  
tor from Illinois,  
Barack Obama**

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# The Black Oaks Newsletter

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## Barack Obama Becomes the Nation's First African-American President



**Barack Obama, the First  
African-American President  
of the United States**

This is a story generations of African-Americans thought might never be told. On November 4th, 2008, Senator Barack Obama, the Democratic Senator from Illinois, became the first African-American President of the United States. This was a Presidential election marked by many historic firsts—the first female vice-presidential candidate on the

GOP ticket, the first time in decades that states like North Carolina, Virginia, and Nevada have gone blue, the first time grandmothers and great-grandmothers registered and voted, and the first time record numbers of young and first-time voters turned up at the polls to have their voices heard. Born Barack Hussein Obama Aug. 4, 1961, in Honolulu, Hawaii, his father, Barack Obama, Sr., was born of Luo ethnicity in Nyanza Province, Kenya. He grew up herding goats with his own father, who was a domestic servant to the British. Although reared among Muslims, Obama, Sr., became an atheist at some point.

Obama's mother, Ann Dunham, grew up in Wichita, Kansas. Her father worked on oil rigs during the Depression. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, he signed up for service in World War II and marched

across Europe in Patton's army. Dunham's mother went to work on a bomber assembly line. After the war, they studied on the G. I. Bill, bought a house through the Federal Housing Program, and moved to Hawaii. Obama's parents separated when he was two years old and later divorced. Dubbed "The One" by Oprah Winfrey, who helped launch him on this improbable journey, President-Elect Obama started a long and arduous campaign almost two years ago. He withstood the controversies, personal attacks, and formidable opponents, and yet that was the easy part. He faces incredible challenges in his first term in office: a struggling economy, ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, nuclear threats, climate change, educational and health crises, and the list goes on. We wish the incumbent president well in his agenda of change, and we salute him on his historic success.

## The Second Independent Studies/AAASE Major Enrolls at Elon

Not since Sowande Mustakeem' graduated in 2000 has there been a student who pursued an independent major in African/African-American Studies. First-year student Francis (Frank) Stiefel '12 has made quite an impression in his first semester at Elon, not just for his history-making decision, but also for the experiences and passion he

brings. Frank attended Haddonfield Memorial High School in NJ. He was a member of STAND (Students Taking Action Now: Darfur) and held a Summit Meeting on Darfur at his high school with other schools throughout the state. He was also a member of Lead for Diversity. This past summer, he volunteered in

Ghana (Senchi Ferry) for five weeks where he taught a first-grade class and helped build a kindergarten class. He was invited to join the Periclean Scholars class of 2010 as a way to continue their work with Ghana. Frank is certain that Elon is the right choice to help him further explore his interests in Black life and culture.

## Profile of Kristine Silvestri: Lumen & Periclean Scholar



Kristine Silvestri 2010

Kristine Silvestri is from Flemington, New Jersey, double-majoring in Political Science and Public Administration, with minors in African/African-American Studies and Leadership. At Elon, Kristine is involved with Crossroads, a women's rape crisis center in Burlington, Alpha Xi Delta sorority, and heads the Elon Green Service Team, which focuses on environmental service. She is also a regular contributor to *The Pendulum*, and has contributed this issue's feature piece on Elon alum,

Letitia Lee (p.5). As a Periclean Scholar, Kristine is engaged in fundraising, grant writing, research, and recruiting future Periclean Scholars. She hopes to continue to present her research on refugees in Ghana nationally and to intern at a politically based non-profit organization while studying abroad there for a semester. Kristine plans to attend graduate school to complete a combined masters program in Law and Public Administration. She wants either to develop her own non-profit organization or

lobby for one.

Kristine's Lumen Research Project explores "the Other" in both an international context (Liberian refugees in Ghana) and a national/local context (American race relations). She has studied abroad in Ghana as part of her ongoing focus on refugees in that country. Her past research has included "Media Images and Social Integration of Liberian and Togoloese Refugees in Ghana", and her final project will be delivered in Spring 2010.

## Profile of Amanda Brown: Lumen & Periclean Scholar



Amanda Brown 2010

Amanda Brown was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio. In high school, she was a member of the marching band, National Honor Society, and served as a yearbook editor. Since sixth grade, Amanda has participated in mission trips every summer with her church, traveling across the country from Huntington Beach to Boston. She has experience with fundraising, development projects, and other volunteer work. At Elon,

she is a Mathematics major and AAASE minor, with a possible additional major in Accounting. She is a member of Alpha Xi Delta sorority and a mathematics tutor for fellow Elon students. As a Periclean, she serves as the accountant and on the Event Planning Committee. Her plans for the future include creating fundraising and fellowship events for Pericleans, and coordinating a scholarship for a Ghanaian

student to study either at a University in Ghana or at Elon.

Amanda's Lumen research focuses on mathematical modeling of malaria epidemics in various regions of sub-Saharan Africa. She will study abroad in South Africa in Winter 2009, where she will participate in a mini-internship with the Malaria Research Institute in Durban. The results of her research will be presented at SURF in Spring 2010.

## Profile of Lauren Taylor: Lumen & Periclean Scholar



Lauren Taylor 2010

Lauren Taylor is from upstate New York. During her high school years, she was very active in speech and debate where she was a Regional Champion in Humorous Interpretation. She was also presented with the District Award for Student Excellence. At Elon, she has become involved with organizations related to leadership (ICLP, SGAC) and service (Elon Volunteers!, EFFECT, and Collective Action and Responsibility). Lauren is also an Elon

College Fellow who is doing research on women who are HIV positive in developing countries. As a Periclean Scholar, she was the lead writer for the successful Fund for Excellence Grant. Lauren spent a semester in Costa Rica and will conduct research and intern with a South African trained OB/GYN in the UK. Lauren hopes to join the Peace Corps and become an OBGYN for women in developing countries.

In preparation, Lauren is currently training to become an EMT, and will study abroad in South Africa next summer where she will conduct research on international women's health issues, with special focus on the role of traditional child delivery practices in South Africa and HIV/AIDS education and control. She will work with the AIDS Foundation of South Africa and midwives while there, conducting ethnographic fieldwork.

## Apply for an AAASE Course Development Grant Now

AAASE invites proposals from all full-time, Elon University faculty for new courses that focus on African, African-American, or Black diasporic experiences from specific disciplinary perspectives. Priority consideration will be given to courses emerging from schools, departments, and programs not traditionally represented in African/African-American Studies at Elon. Faculty in the School of Business, those in Fine Arts, Philosophy, Foreign Languages, Religious Studies, Mathematics, Psychology, and

the sciences are especially encouraged to apply. However, all proposals will be considered and evaluated by the selection committee. Successful applications should include a description of the course, the objectives, a discussion of the kinds of students who would benefit from the course, and suggest a timeline for teaching the course during the next two academic years, 2009-2011. Faculty members should also demonstrate how the proposed course relates to their scholarly, pedagogical, and or research inter-

ests. In submitting the application, faculty must commit to teaching the course for two consecutive years, with the approval of their department chair and the dean of their school, and must participate in a series of four course development workshops sponsored by CATL & AAASE in Spring 2009. The successful applicants will be awarded a stipend of \$1000 each for successfully developing the course and fulfilling the requirements of the award. For an application, email [playne@elon.edu](mailto:playne@elon.edu)



**AAASE Course  
Development Grants  
Available Now!**

## New Director & Vision for the Multicultural Center, Leon Williams

For the first time since its founding, the Elon University Multicultural Center has a new leader. Mr. Leon Williams replaces the Center's founding Director, Ms. L'Tanya Richmond, who left Elon after twenty years to assume a similar role at Smith College in Massachusetts. Mr. Williams brings a wealth of experience to his new position. He served for the past eight years as Director of Intercultural Programs at Buena Vista Univer-

sity, where he implemented strategic initiatives and diversity programs. He was also Director of Multicultural Development and Assistant Football Coach at Ohio Northern University for seven years. Mr. Williams is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Studies, with an emphasis in Social Psychology and a concentration in Trauma from Union Institute & University in Cincinnati, Ohio. His research explores how cultural trauma impacts

aspects of psychological and emotional identity among African Americans. He also holds a Master's in Counseling from The University of Dayton and a Bachelor's in Business Management from Ohio Northern University. A consultant with CAMPUSPEAK, Inc., Mr. Williams has delivered various lectures at several universities around the country. He will lead the university in its priority of expanding the role of the Multicultural Center.



**Director of the  
Multicultural Center,  
Mr. Leon Williams**

## Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies Offerings Strengthen AAASE

In 2007, Elon received a \$162,760 federal grant to develop an interdisciplinary minor in Middle Eastern Studies. Professors in art, communications, English, foreign languages, history, philosophy, political science and religious studies will design 11 courses for the program. Their work, as well as much of the salary of the new full-time Arabic language professor, Dr. Shereen Shawki Elgamal, new library resources, guest speakers, and developing

an exchange program with universities in the Middle East, is being paid for by the grant money and university matching funds. Finding qualified Arabic instructors can be difficult, but Elon first offered Arabic in the fall of 2005 through a part-time instructor who left the university for a job elsewhere. The recently hired Arabic professor, Elgamal, received a doctorate in education from East Carolina University in 2005. Her thesis was entitled

"Assessing the Individual Needs of K-12 Principals in the area of Technology and Computer Applications." She previously taught Arabic and was principal at the Al-Iman School in Raleigh. Since arriving at Elon, Dr. Elgamal has been offering popular courses in Arabic and a General Studies seminar called "Culture of Egypt," the place of her birth. These classes will help develop & strengthen AAASE offerings on Northern Africa.



**Shereen Elgamal  
Assistant Professor  
Arabic and  
Middle Eastern Studies**



## AAASE & Periclean Scholars '10 To Participate in AIDS Walk

Periclean Scholars 2010, spearheaded by Jordan Frederick, is teaming up with AAASE W/GS & the Elon chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, Inc. for the 17th Annual Winter Walk for AIDS, presented by Triad Health Project, Greensboro Parks and Recreation, MillerCoors, Time Warner Cable, and YES! Weekly Magazine. The event takes place on World AIDS Day, December 7th, 2008 at historic War Memorial Stadium in Greensboro. Registration is free, although the groups will make a donation to the event.

Approximately 30,000 North Carolinians live with HIV/AIDS, many unaware of their status. In Guilford County, almost 2,000 cases have been diagnosed. Of those, over 500 individuals are currently seeking services from Triad Health Project, which received 8 new client intakes during August of 2008. Color, pageantry, and lots of compassion - rain, shine, or snow - will mark the event. Walk teams and individuals will take to the beautiful streets of the Aycock Neighborhood, Fisher Park, and downtown for

the 3-mile trek to raise vital funds and awareness for the fight against HIV/AIDS in the Piedmont, and remembering those lost to AIDS. Guilford County State Representative Pricey Harrison will serve as Honorary Chairwoman for her tremendous contributions to the HIV/AIDS crisis, introducing and advocating for policies, services, and statewide prevention programs. For further information, visit <http://www.triadhealthproject.com/news/index.php> and email [jfrederick4@elon.edu](mailto:jfrederick4@elon.edu)

## Dr. Ayesha Delpish Named CATL Scholar 2009-11



Dr. Ayesha Delpish  
Assistant Professor  
of Mathematics

AAASE faculty member, Dr. Ayesha Delpish, Assistant Professor in the Department of Mathematics and Coordinator of the Statistics Program, has been named one of four Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning Scholars for 2009-11. Her project, "Towards a Community of Learners: A Case Study Approach to Statistics," investigates the case-study approach as a teaching and learning tool

as applied in MTH 212: Statistics in Application. The CATL-Scholar award will support Dr. Delpish's need to obtain and share perspectives on the advantages and issues with using case studies as an inquiry-based learning approach to teaching. The project will explore methods of incorporating inquiry-based learning into core courses, obtain ideas for the development of case studies, and find new ways to engage

multiple majors at once in an attempt to reach a positive outcome for student-centered learning. She received her Ph.D. in Statistics from The Florida State University, and received Bachelor degrees in Mathematics and Spanish from Saint Mary's University. She specializes in educational testing & measurement, statistics education, and is committed to encouraging and supporting minorities in the sciences.

## Join the Early Kwanzaa Celebration in the Multicultural Center



Join AAASE and the Multicultural Student Council on Friday, December 5th from 3:15-5:15 p.m. in the Elon University Multicultural Center for an early Kwanzaa celebration filled with music and tasty holiday treats. As an African American and Pan-African holiday created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga and celebrated by millions throughout the world African community, Kwanzaa brings a cultural message which speaks to the best of what it

means to be African and human in the fullest sense. Celebrated from December 26th to January 1st, its origins are in the first harvest celebrations of family, community, and culture. The name Kwanzaa is derived from the phrase "matunda ya kwanza" which means "first fruits" in Swahili. The first-fruits celebrations are recorded as far back as ancient Egypt and Nubia and appear in ancient and modern times in other classical African civilizations

such as Ashantiland and Yorubaland. These celebrations are also found in ancient and modern times among empires like the Zulu kingdom or smaller societies and groups like the Matabele, Thonga and Lovedu, all of southeastern Africa. Kwanzaa builds on the five fundamental activities of Continental African "first fruit" celebrations: ingathering; reverence; commemoration; recommitment; and celebration. Contact [cdiedrick@elon.edu](mailto:cdiedrick@elon.edu)

## Daughter of Elon Makes A Colorful Splash in the Art World by Kristine Silvestri

Letitia Lee '99 transferred from Shaw University, a historically black college in Raleigh, to Elon. She describes her first experience with Elon as really incredible, mixed with emotions, like anyone would feel traveling from an urban setting to an expansive campus with acres of beautiful buildings. After seeing the obvious differences between the haves and have nots, Lee reports feeling a twinge of pride and excitement intermingled with depression and guilt. The pride and excitement came from being a minority woman who worked hard for her successes in a world not necessarily geared towards her. Lee has no regrets about her successes, but did experience the emotions that come from a significant change in lifestyle. Lee grew up with very little money in her home and in her community, and was now at a school with opportunities and a "privileged lifestyle." She recalls a weekend trip at an Elon friend's lake house when the group on the boat saw firsthand the rare beauty of a bald eagle soaring overhead. She describes seeing the rare bird as "the greatest and saddest moment of my life." Lee knew that none of her neighborhood friends would ever be able to see a bald eagle in its natural habitat, travel the world, or even experience something as simple as riding in a boat. Lee says she was reminded of her privileged position when she went off campus with friends to order food: "We'd go out to eat and I would notice right away that almost everyone who worked in the kitchen or as servers were lower income minorities; then I'd feel a sense of sadness and guilt because I was lucky enough to be the one ordering and not working." Although the realities of classism in the world are not lost on her, she

does not allow the state of things to get her down. She is an incredibly outgoing, bubbly individual who likes to laugh and make others smile. She uses her art to reflect on the nature of humanity, to make sense of the world, to heal, and to demonstrate what any human can accomplish regardless of color. She refers to art as something "I cannot live without; it's my everything." I asked Ms. Lee if not being able to paint would be like losing a limb; she said it would be far worse. She would still be able to paint if she lost an arm, because she would have the other. Not having art would "be like not having oxygen because without it, I would die." The world around her serves as the inspiration for her paintings. She believes that because she has been given this talent, she must use it. In many cases, she uses art as a way to inspire emotion. For instance, if she sees something that arouses emotion, she will paint it because it deserves to be captured and shared. Ms. Lee believes that if life provokes a true emotion in her, that most likely it will do so for someone else: "I feel like people are more alike than different." Not all of Ms. Lee's paintings are available to the public. She keeps a small collection at home, including paintings that are reflections on traumatizing personal experiences like the murder of a childhood friend.

Ms. Lee recalls her experiences studying abroad in Ghana. There, she was struck by the beauty and grace of a woman selling pineapples. She captured the moment in a photograph and later used it as the basis of a painting. Quite fittingly, a copy of that painting now hangs in the Department

of History and Geography, home to historian Dr. Brian Digre, founder of Elon's Ghana Abroad program. The department purchased two other high quality reproductions of Ms. Lee's original paintings, including one inspired by the tragic events in Darfur. Ms. Lee is proud to have her artwork hanging at her alma mater, in private homes, a major stadium, and abroad. Ms. Lee reports that as a black female, she is something of an anomaly in an industry dominated by white males and that her artwork can provide a different perspective. She does not believe that she has been discriminated against for opportunities to show her work based on the color of her skin, but admits that because of the realities of discrimination, "you can never really know what goes on behind closed doors." She feels her laid back approach to selling—having the customer show interest first and then engaging them in her inspirations—has helped to make her a successful artist. Ms. Lee really loved her Elon experiences, which are reflected in her everyday life. Ms. Lee feels that Elon's push towards "building community" is one of its greatest selling points—"it's a place where you have a second family." Ms. Lee continues to stay in touch with several of her professors, especially those in both of her majors of Broadcast Communications and Fine Arts, as well as the many friends she made at Elon. She has no doubt that the university will remain "cutting edge" by focusing on "continual improvement." You can learn more about Ms. Lee and purchase her artwork through her website <http://www.leemeeart.com/>



*Ms. Letitia Lee was the first African American to graduate from Elon with a Bachelor's degree in Art. She is an award winning professional artist who splits her time between her studio in Virginia and traveling around the United States participating in various art shows. AAASE minor, Kristine Silvestri spoke with Ms. Lee about what it was like to be African American at Elon in the 1990s, her inspiration, and the challenges she faces in the art world.*



"Wholesome Foundation" (Watercolor)

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The mission of the program is to provide imaginative and productive spaces that foster excellence, nurture the scholarly and cultural pursuits of our students and faculty, bring global exposure to the program, and expose a wider cross-section of the Elon University community to the histories, societies, politics, languages, cultures, and economies of Black people within the United States, Africa, and throughout the world. In addition to its principle aim of stimulating teaching, research, scholarship, and service, the program will also serve as a national and international forum for individuals and organizations with an interest in and concern for African-Americans, Africa, and the rest of her Diaspora.

Visit our website:  
[www.elon.edu/aaase](http://www.elon.edu/aaase)



## The Coordinator's Corner

The winds of change are in the air! AAASE, Elon, and our nation are in a state of transformation. Our program is busy preparing for its five-year external review and focused on strengthening our curriculum. Elon is in the midst of hiring several senior level administrators, including a Provost, Dean of the Law School, Dean of International Programs, and America just elected Barack Obama its first African-American President. Delving into the unknown and the uncertainty of what the future holds can be scary, but also positive. We all welcome new leaders who bring new perspectives, and fresh energy, but as one of my colleagues recently noted, we don't want people who are going to mess it up! Yet, our leaders can only do so much on their own.

Without the support and hard work of the people they serve, nothing would get done; we couldn't move forward or even worse, we'd move backwards. This is an extremely important year for African/African-American Studies at Elon. While we are on target in executing our five-year plan, and we've worked hard to revive a struggling program, this year we will either move forward or backward. What do we need? Faculty: we need a campus-wide commitment on your part to revisit your current classes, and to consider how you can incorporate modules that focus on the exploration of Black life and culture or apply for a \$1000 course development grant to create a new course for the program, especially if your department has no offerings. Students, we need you to

demand these classes and themes from your instructors. Your persistence will help create a more diverse and robust curriculum. Staff: In all areas, we want your support in strengthening our cultural programming, and local and global service initiatives. It will take everyone to make our program a success. We refuse to be an afterthought, a program established to appease, or satisfy a checkmark on Admissions brochures. AAASE makes a vital contribution to the fabric of the Elon community, just as we depend on our community for our very existence.



AAASE Program  
Coordinator  
Dr. Prudence Layne