

The Black Oaks Newsletter

Volume I, Issue I

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- Recruiting AAAS minors
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Who are the Black Oaks?

Since its founding in 1889, Elon, the Hebrew word for "oak," continues to take its name and its tradition seriously. Towering oak trees adorn the immaculately manicured grounds, business establishments bearing the name and insignia of the acorn surround the campus, and each member of the Elon University community is taught to value the symbolic strength and resilience the oak represents, receiving an acorn at their first opening convocation, and an oak sapling when they graduate.

Blacks at Elon also embrace the legacy of the oak. The history of African-Americans and other Blacks at Elon has been relatively short. The first Black student, Glenda Phillips, enrolled in 1963, and the first course in African-American studies was not offered until 1979. It was only in 1994 that the African/

African American Studies Program at Elon University (AAASE) was recognized as an interdisciplinary minor. This year marks a new direction for the program as it welcomes a new coordinator, advisory board, website, vision, and a host of other innovations.

The Black Oak, whose Latin name is *Quercus velutina*, represents the community of students, faculty, and staff at Elon dedicated to studying the cultures and lives of African-Americans, Africans, and other Blacks throughout the world,

This inaugural issue of *The Black Oaks Newsletter* represents our attempt to keep the larger community informed of newsworthy items related to the African/African American Studies program. Each issue will be dedi-

cated to profiling the faculty, staff, students, and alumni that comprise this program. In addition to meeting these extraordinary men and women, we will also feature important events and issues.

The newsletter will be published once each semester. Your ideas, suggestions, and contributions to future issues are always welcomed. If you have an idea for a feature story, contact us at aaase@elon.edu. In the meantime, read and enjoy!



Come Join Us!

We are always looking for new members to join us. All students, faculty, and staff with a keen interest and desire to learn more about the lives and cultures of African-Americans, Africans, the people of the Caribbean, and other Blacks throughout the world, please consider taking courses in the minor, come hear our exciting

guest speakers, join our annual Black Experience Tour, travel abroad to Ghana, South Africa, and Barbados, and participate in our events across campus. Check the African/African American Studies website frequently for updates about what's happening: www.elon.edu/aaase We look forward to welcoming you!



Archbishop Desmond Tutu
Elon, April 2003

Professor Digre and Elon's Ghana Program Mark Important Milestone



Dr. Brian Digre
Professor - History

January 2006 marked the ten-year milestone for Elon's winter-term Ghana class, and for Professor Brian Digre, who has led the program every year since its inception. The course, combining travel throughout the country and discussions with Ghanaian professors, allows students to experience life in contemporary Ghana while learning about the country's rich history and culture.

Over the years, a highlight of the class has been visiting the community of Sokode in the

Volta Region, which include family visits and attending church and traditional festivals. Elon students have contributed to developing Sokode's schools and have left with warm memories and new insights. In 2004, Digre was installed as Sokode's development chief, Togbe Dake. He appreciates the honor as well as the many contributions colleagues in Ghana and at Elon have made to our courses' success. Ghana has also been a topic of Professor Digre's research and writing. He served as senior re-

search fellow at the Center for Democratic Development during Ghana's 2004 elections, worked to develop a student exchange program with the University of Ghana, and wrote a Fulbright grant that will bring Professor Francis Amedahe from the University of Cape Coast to Elon in 2006-07. Professor Digre teaches modern African history and is the coordinator of Elon's international studies major. In 2005-06, he served as interim coordinator for AAASE. He will return to Ghana in Winter 2007.

While at Elon my entire focus was more so on the AFAM experience . . . As I continue to move further in my studies, my perspective has broadened to . . . a greater analysis of the African Diaspora. That is why I love my program so much because depending on your interest, you can be moved mentally to understand there is more to the multiple experiences of Black people throughout the global world.

Meet AAASE Minor Krysten Trull, Class of 2007

Krysten L. Trull hails from Bridgeton, NJ, and is a member of the 2007 graduation class. Krysten writes, "The reason that I chose to be an African/African American Studies minor is because I am very interested in the culture of Africa and the history of the people. I took an African American history class in my senior year of high school, and my teacher's pride and extreme knowledge in the subject helped fuel my

interests and made me want to study further."

Krysten goes on to discuss her experiences here at Elon: "I am majoring in Sociology with a minor in AAAS, I hope to work with people of different cultures after college in a business or performing social work. I love taking the AAAS classes, especially the literature and history classes. The works and ideas of African American men and women throughout history

are very articulate and offer insight into the problems and concerns of modern-day society. I enjoy all of my AAAS classes and hope to take many more in the future."

Having served as a member of Elon's Tyler-Perry Black Excellence Awards Planning Committee, Krysten stays involved in many of the programs and activities that showcase the rich legacy and culture of Blacks at the institution.



Sowande' Mustakeem
'00 was the first Elon student to graduate with a major in AAAS

AAASE Alum Sowande' Mustakeem Studies the Middle Passage

Sowande' Mustakeem, originally from Atlanta, Georgia, received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Elon as the first Independent Major in African-American Studies in 2000. She went on to receive a Master of Arts degree in African-American and African Studies from Ohio State University in 2002. Sowande' is currently a doctoral candidate at Michigan State University, where she is pursuing her doctorate degree in Comparative Black History

within the Department of History. While her doctoral dissertation focuses specifically on uncovering the multiple experiences associated with the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in the eighteenth century, she is equally interested in Slavery, African American History & Culture, Black Women's History, Diaspora Studies, Medical History, and Pop Culture and Its Impact on Historical Memory. Since her tenure at Elon, Sowande has both traveled and

researched extensively throughout the world including Costa Rica, Egypt, Ghana, Holland, Brazil, Jamaica, and England. Her dissertation project, "Ripples of Infinity: Gender, Health, and Violence in the Middle Passage, 1721-1808" conducts a social history of the slave ship experience during the legal slave trading period. She looks forward to becoming a college professor and continuing her international travels and research in the near future.

Affirmative Action Takes Center Stage in McCrary Theatre

On Tuesday, September 12th, 2006 at 7:30 p.m. in McCrary Theatre, Roland Fryer, Jr. presents "The Science of Affirmative Action." Affirmative action policy regulates the allocation of scarce positions in education, employment, and business contracting. These policies have remained highly controversial, and the discussion is often filled with fiery rhetoric containing little scientific analysis. Fryer will present a statistical approach to dispel some myths and misconceptions in the current racial affirmative

action debates.

Fryer is currently assistant professor of economics at Harvard University, a junior fellow in the Harvard Society of Fellows, and a faculty research fellow at the National Bureau of Economic Research. He has published papers on topics such as the racial achievement gap, the causes and consequences of distinctly black names, affirmative action, and the impact of the crack cocaine epidemic.

Dr. Fryer describes himself as an unapologetic analyst of racial inequality who uses theoretical and empirical tools to squeeze truths from the data – wherever that may lead. The event, sponsored by the Liberal Arts Forum and the Love School of Business, promises to be rather engaging. All students are encouraged to attend.



Roland Frye, Jr.
Harvard University
Assistant Professor of
Economics

Pearl Cleage's *Blues for an Alabama Sky* Comes to Elon

This historic production set in 1930 promises scintillating dialogue rich in African American culture, great fun and tense drama as the lives of struggling musicians, artists, and social activists unfold during the era of the Harlem Renaissance and America's Great Depression. Central themes include economic hardship and reproductive rights, and if that doesn't get you fired up, perhaps the loud gunshot fired during the performance will.

In an interview entitled "Blues for an Alabama Sky," which appeared in *American Theatre* 13:6 (July-August 1996), Douglas Langworthy asked the playwright, Pearl Cleage, about her use of the virtually unknown characters in her play. Cleage responds, "I am not a historian, and I'm not interested in doing all the research to write a play where Langston Hughes is the central character. Especially as an African American, we tend to pluck out people and put

them forward as role models, as heroes - but we pluck them out of their communities, so that there is no context for them. They are made more respectable, they have no rough edges, they never do the things that regular people do" (21). Elon actors promise to make Cleage's ordinary folk, and their extraordinary feats come alive.



"I'm not interested in doing all the research to write a play where Langston Hughes is the central character."

Sigma Tau Delta Welcomes South African Ambassador to Elon

Following the induction of Elon University students into the International English Honor Society, the South African Ambassador to the United States, Her Excellency Barbara Masekela, will deliver the Sigma Tau Delta lecture on October 23, 2006 in McKinnon Hall at 7:00 p.m.

Masekela received her education in South Africa and Zambia, graduating with a BA (cum laude) from the University of

Ohio in 1971. After an academic career as Assistant Professor of English at Staten Island Community College, NY and Rutgers University, NJ, she founded the African National Congress Office of Arts and Culture, and served as its secretary for seven years. After serving in various positions with the ANC, President Mandela appointed Ms. Masekela ambassador to the Republic of France and to UNESCO as well in 1995. In 1999, Ms. Masekela

joined the corporate world, holding a number of executive and non-executive posts. She returned to the diplomatic world in 2003.

However, the ambassador's love of fine art and letters remains strong. She is a writer in her own right, and enjoys reading and gardening. She is the sister of famous jazz musician Hugh Masekela, and she has two sons, Mabusha and Selema.



Her Excellency
Barbara Masekela

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 history, 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.



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New Program Coordinator Appointed

Effective Fall 2006, Prudence Layne, Assistant Professor in the Department of English has been appointed the new coordinator of African/African American Studies at Elon. She replaces Dr. Brian Digre, Professor of History and Coordinator of International Studies, who served as Interim Coordinator of the program for one year until a permanent replacement was found. Previously, Professor Wilhemina Boyd in the Department of English served as the program coordinator for twelve years.

Born in the Caribbean island of Barbados, Dr. Layne grew up between Barbados and Mount Vernon, New York. She also lived in the Faroe Islands before attending Howard University where she received two

Bachelor degrees in English and Political Science, specializing in International Relations, and minoring in Spanish. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate, Dr. Layne received her Ph.D. from the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida. In addition to African-American studies, her research interests include Caribbean literature, hybridity, nationalism, post-colonialism, women's and gender studies, and confinement literature,

Dr. Layne begins her second year at Elon University dedicated to bringing a renewed sense of excitement and vitality to one of Elon's most important programs of study. "If I had my way, each Elon University student would be required to study the rich and vibrant cultures of Black people

throughout the world. Imagine a world where no Martin Luther King, Jr., Miles Davis, Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela, Sojourner Truth, Oprah Winfrey, Harriet Tubman, or Frederick Douglass ever existed. . . . Our lives would have been vastly different! My wish is that all Elon students recognize the value that a background in AAAS studies presents when they seek employment, and how the study of these cultures impact their daily lives.



*New Program
Coordinator, Dr.
Prudence Layne*