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ENG110

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Paper 2 Workshop Draft

On the afternoon of March 28th, I pay Dante a visit at the front desk of Mosely, where he works several days a week (as I’ll soon find out, he also works as a student researcher and as an RA in the global commons as a means of helping fund his education). A steady buzz of conversation hangs in the background as we open with a few minutes of small talk, then settle into the rhythm of our interview. Eventually, we work our way to the topic of community, and of belonging. When I ask him if his financial situation affects the way he sees himself fitting it at Elon, he pauses for a moment, then tells me, “I guess you could say that I see myself as an outlier, because while that is a stereotype of Elon students, there’s still a degree of accuracy… There’s a lot of rich kids who have rich parents who chuck ‘em off down here, so it’s not completely inaccurate... so I definitely see myself as an outlier. But I don’t think I’m the only one either.” So, in his own eyes, Dante’s an outlier, but not the only one. He sees himself as isolated— but not completely. In short: it’s complicated. And more than anything else, that’s what I found; that financial pressures impact Elon students in ways more subtle than the stereotypes that exist on campus would suggest.

For example: I imagined, before I recorded my interviews, that being under significant financial pressure as a student and keeping up with multiple jobs would make it somewhere between difficult and impossible to maintain strong grades in college. It was all pretty straightforward, I imagined: financial pressures mean less time and energy to devote to academics, which should lead to lower grades. I quickly learned otherwise: both Dante and Bridgette (my other interviewee) have achieved high levels of academic success at Elon, despite their tough financial situations. I don’t want to downplay Dante and Bridgette’s achievements here; they’ve found academic success at Elon because they’re hard-working and dedicated, not because it’s easy. And despite their success, they both point out that being under financial pressure can absolutely effect on a student’s academic life. Bridgette explains how financial pressures can affect students in unexpected ways when she tells me, “Textbooks have been a very big struggle for me… that’s one thing with professors that I don’t think they realize a lot of the time, not everyone here is able to drop 200 dollars on a book.” She goes on to say that she’s unsure how she’s going to pay for future textbooks once her stipend runs out and that, “I even know people who have changed majors because of the amount of textbooks and the amount of money it is.”

As we dug a little deeper into how both students were able to be academically successful, they both brought up the same idea: prioritization. Both talked about the necessity and difficulty of maintaining balance in their lives between their academics, their financial responsibilities, their social lives, and their responsibility to their families. For Bridgette, that last issue – of responsibility to family – came up repeatedly. She credits her mom with instilling in her a toughness and work ethic that’s been critical to her success at Elon, but also mentions that, “even in my mind now, I’m thinking about all the stuff my mom has to deal with back at home without me.” She goes on to say, though, that, “even though that’s always a part of me, I don’t let that stop me from being successful.” For Dante, the question of prioritization is more one of work-life balance. He says of his mindset: “You gotta ask yourself on a consistent basis— I could go out now, or I could sign up for another shift. What are my priorities?” When I ask him if he feels like he’s been able to find a balance at Elon, he tells me yes – despite the workload, he thinks that finding a balance here is possible, and that he’s managed to organize his priorities in a way that works for him.

Despite their financial situations, Bridgette and Dante are both involved in the Elon community. In fact, in an unexpected turn, Bridgette’s financial situation has actually contributed positively to her sense of belonging at Elon (at least in one way). Bridgette is an Odyssey scholar, which means that part of her tuition is paid for by the Odyssey program as long as she maintains good grades. She’s one of a group of 30 Odyssey scholars in her class, and one of approximately 100 at Elon. As she explains the program, she describes her excitement at meeting the next class Odyssey scholars because, as she tells me glowingly, her fellow program members are “like family”. I note that it sounds like the program provides something like a built-in community at Elon, and she agrees.

Additional Structure needed:

* Expand on the (currently) last paragraph by talking about how both interviewees are very active in the Elon community despite their time commitments
* Paragraph on how financial pressures can cause social friction (probably after the priorities/balance paragraph), before the current last paragraph
  + Bridgette talking about clothes
  + Dante talking about just the pure time needed to work/having to sacrifice social life
* Conclusion paragraph
* One more? (ask prof/group)