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# Where are they now?

**By: Katherine Quinn**

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Matt Ragland  
Graduated: December 2004  
Major: Philosophy and Psychology

Reid Umstatted  
Graduated: May 2005  
Major: Radio-Television-Film

UT graduates Matt Ragland and Reid Umstatted did not know a summer camp friendship would lay the basis for a six-member band with a shot at stardom. Ragland, the lead songwriter, and Umstatted, the lead singer, started Nelo as Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity brothers but got serious upon graduation. The two shared their struggles and goals as musicians and the story behind their band's name with The Daily Texan.

Daily Texan: How did Nelo begin?

Matt Ragland: I know most of the musicians from high school and planned on starting a band with them but did not get serious until I started working with Reid. I was a songwriter and guitarist and Reid could sing, so that kind of bridged the gap. I wrote most of my songs when I was a student at UT.

Reid Umstatted: Matt and I met at Camp Longhorn when we were 10 years old, but we did not start playing together until college. Matt did most of the planning, but we were both trying to get finished with school at the time.

DT: How did you come up with the band name Nelo?

MR: Nelo is a strategy in the card game Spades. Basically, you try to lose every single hand to try to win big in the end. I was always attracted to that. It took on a weird emotional significance for me, which is the approach I take with songwriting. People perceive my music as positive and happy, but a lot of the time it stems from something negative. I like to use the negativity to make something positive.

DT: How did your time as a student at UT affect your music career?

MR: A lot of people say that my major contributed to my lyrics. Philosophy and psychology were the only two fields of study I was interested in. It probably inspired me to read and write more and kept the juices flowing in my brain.

RU: I used what I learned in a couple of classes to edit our MySpace page.

DT: Describe some of your early gigs.

MR: Nobody was there, though we had friends who were also UT students come out and support us. The first place we played together was Waterloo Ice House and then frequently at the Cactus Cafe.

DT: What have been some of your biggest struggles in starting and promoting Nelo?

MR: My business plan from day one was to make it so that if we were not successful, it was because people did not like us, not because they had not heard of us. The biggest challenge is to get our music into as many ears as possible.

DT: Your Web site shows that you are sponsored by Dell. How did that come about?

RU: We entered a contest to win a spot in the Austin City Limits Festival last fall. We placed second out of many other bands, so Dell is now sponsoring our tour. Our next big show is Feb. 9 at the Granada Theater in Dallas.

DT: What are your goals for Nelo?

RU: I hope it is something that becomes my career. I would like for us to be the next Rolling Stones and be on the road for the next 40 years - hopefully making a little more money than we are now. Being successful and doing what we want to do is all we can ask for.

MR: I guess a goal would be to make more records and have the financial stability to continue playing night after night. If I can inspire someone like Dave Matthews inspired me, I would be happy. I would feel like my mission was accomplished, even if it was just one person. This is our first record, and we have a lot of stuff on the back burner, so if we could have the opportunity to play and record it, I would be happy.

DT: What advice would you give students who want to start their own bands?

MR: Make sure you are serious. Make sure you have a plan. Do not stop for anything or anybody. Roll with the punches, because there will be many.

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