

A HUSHED LEGACY SAMUEL MERRITT’S STORY AS A DESCENDANT OF A LYNCHING VICTIM

Samuel Merritt’s story as a descendant of a lynching victim

Lilly Molina  
Elon News Network

Samuel Merritt’s great-great-grandfather, Wyatt Outlaw, was lynched on Feb. 26, 1870. Outlaw was dragged out of his home in the middle of the night by a mob of 60 and hanged on an Elm tree in the corner of downtown Graham. His body is nowhere to be found, and for a long time his legacy was hidden within the Outlaw family. “There was some general conversation around the dinner table regarding Wyatt, but nothing in-depth,” Merritt said. It wasn’t until the past five years that Merritt truly got to know more about his ancestor.

The man, the myth, the legend

Outlaw was born in Caswell County in April of 1816 and was one of 13 childrens to be fathered by Chelsey Faucette, the sixth wealthiest man in Alamance County at the time, according to the Alamance County Remembrance Coalition. Faucette was a trustee to Graham College, the predecessor of Elon University. However, Outlaw was raised by Faucette’s neighbors on a tobacco farm due to his father being white and his mother being Black. In his adult years, Outlaw was involved in the Union League – working auxiliaries focusing on increasing Black votership and mentoring newly freed slaves. He was also a successful small owner of a bar. In 1868, Outlaw



LILLY MOLINA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Samuel Merritt stands near the Confederate statue located nearly one hundred feet away from where his great-great-grandfather Wyatt Outlaw was lynched.

was elected to be a member of the Graham Town Council. Two years later the White Brotherhood, a branch of the Ku Klux Klan originally formed in Alamance County, murdered Outlaw because he defended Black police officers. William Puryear, a local, was a witness to Outlaw’s lynching and also ended up being murdered by some of the members. There have been three recorded lynchings in Alamance County: John Jeffress, Puryear and Outlaw. Of the three, Jeffress is the only one to be honored at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice

within the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama. The memorial’s goal is to honor the 4,400 Black Americans who were victims of lynchings. There is one corten steel monument per county, with names of each person lynched inscribed, such as Jeffress. However, because there is no formal tracking of lynchings throughout history, names have been forgotten, such as Outlaw and Puryear. Outlaw’s history was mainly uncovered and preserved by the Alamance County Community Remembrance Coalition. The

Coalition is a local organization focused on educating the Alamance community on their history on racial terror. Every year the coalition organizes a candlelight vigil to commemorate Outlaw’s life and legacy, and the event’s organizers always extend an invitation to Merritt. He said this event and others got him more involved with his heritage. “It’s like discovering something new at a seasoned age, because I had no in-depth information when I was growing up as a child, it was like a hushed history,”

Merritt said. The North Carolinian had never even stepped foot into downtown Graham until 2021. Coalition member Loy Campbell said some members of the organization are historians and continue to uncover new information regarding the lynching victims. “The story changes as these historians keep doing their good work to figure out what happened,” Campbell said.

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Hundreds of universities sign statement condemning Trump administration ‘overreach’; Elon not included

Universities release statement following political interference in education

Avery Sloan  
Elon News Network

The American Association of Colleges and Universities released “A Call for Constructive Engagement” on April 22. This was released by university presidents across the U.S. in response to the “unprecedented government overreach and political interference now endangering American higher education.” The statement calls for “constructive engagement that improves our institutions and serves our republic.” The mission of the AACU is to advance the “democratic purposes

of higher education by promoting equity, innovation and excellence in liberal education,” according to its website. As of 10 a.m. April 29, 555 university and college presidents have signed on — Elon University has not. Eric Townsend, university spokesperson, provided a statement on the university’s behalf. While Elon has not signed onto the letter, Townsend wrote that higher education still stands together as a sector to work through current “challenging federal policies.” “Elon University has reviewed the AAC&U letter and appreciates that this message supports and complements the ongoing efforts of many higher education leaders to collectively convey the importance and value of higher education,” Townsend wrote. “Many university and college

leaders are working through appropriate legal challenges in partnership with higher education professional associations.” Randy Williams, vice president and associate provost for inclusive excellence, also did not respond to Elon News Network’s immediate request for comment. Williams is also a member of the board of directors of the AACU. Jason Kirk, Elon political science professor, said even without Elon signing onto the letter, the message of the letter and diversity of the schools included stood out to him. “I think that was also really affirming to see this isn’t just the Ivy’s and the elite schools,” Kirk said. “The statement specifically talks about the real diversity of higher ed in the U.S., including community colleges and liberal arts colleges, which is where Elon

began as a liberal arts college.” Schools are responding in different ways to federal pressure to change practices within institutions in exchange for federal funding. Harvard University was the first university to reject what the university president described as “unprecedented demands,” including eliminating diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

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THE PENDULUM

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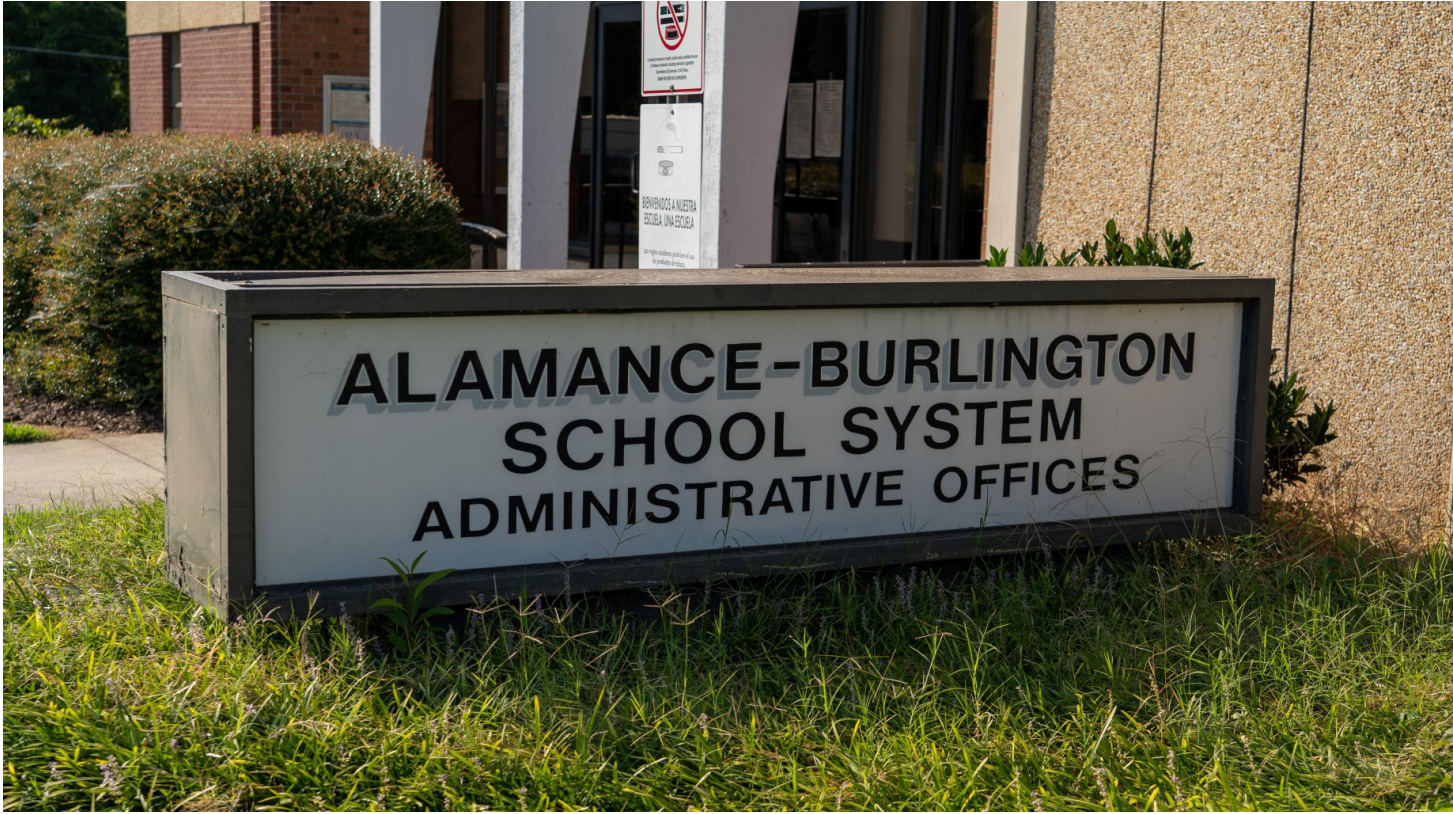
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# Elon professor appointed to Alamance-Burlington Board of Education



ENN FILE PHOTO

The Alamance-Burlington School System Administrative Offices.

After 16 candidate applications, ABSS board appointed Eric Hall to fill board vacancy

Avery Sloan

Elon News Network

Eric Hall, Elon professor of exercise science, was appointed to the Alamance-Burlington Board of Education during the April 28 meeting in a 4-2 vote. Originally, 16 candidates applied for the board vacancy, but soon afterward one candidate dropped out and before April 28 two more candidates had withdrawn their applications. Out of the 13 remaining candidates, eight spoke at the meeting.

"I'm excited, obviously, but obviously nervous too, just being something I haven't done before, but excited for the opportunity to represent my children and other children in the community," Hall said.

During his three-minute statement allotted to each candidate at the meeting, Hall said he was looking to join the board after living in Alamance County for 25 years. Hall is also Elon's assistant provost for scholarship and creative activity and

director of undergraduate research.

He has two children at Elon Elementary and said during the meeting that through his work at Elon University and connection to the county, he felt it was important to give back to the community.

"I know the value of a public school education as that was what my background was," Hall said. "We have made a commitment to be in this county because we see the potential in the growth of what's here and that we are excited to be here and seeing just the landscape of higher education and of education in general."

During the meeting, 14 community members gave public comments before each candidate spoke. Each ABSS board meeting has a public comment section where members of the community can speak for three minutes about issues within the county. Seven out of the 14 community members showed their support for former North Carolina State Rep. Ricky Hurtado, one of the candidates who applied. None of the other seven community members who spoke referenced any candidate.

The two board members who voted no to Hall — Seneca Rogers and Tameka Harvey — both mentioned Hurtado as a strong candidate while the board deliberated. Harvey said she would be supporting

Hurtado because county leadership is lacking in Latino representation. Out of the current six person board of education, Rogers and Harvey are the only people of color.

“

WE HAVE MADE A COMMITMENT TO BE IN THIS COUNTY BECAUSE WE SEE THE POTENTIAL IN THE GROWTH OF WHAT'S HERE AND THAT WE ARE EXCITED TO BE HERE AND SEEING JUST THE LANDSCAPE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND OF EDUCATION IN GENERAL.

ERIC HALL

ELON PROFESSOR

"I said, before I ever became a board member, one of my goals was that if I become a board member, I want to fight for the next board member to be from our Latino community, because it represents what our community looks like," Harvey said. "We want boards to represent what our community looks like."

Board member Dan Ingle said he supported Hall because of his role at Elon and how that could be beneficial to the board's current needs. Last school year, ABSS faced a \$25.8 million mold crisis after 32 out of 36 schools tested positive for mold. Ingle said having a board member with a knowledge of heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems would be helpful.

"When you talk about things like HVAC and other things, we have a provost at Elon University, that's part of what his job and what he does a lot of other things," Ingle said. "His name is Eric Hall. ... He is a problem solver, is what I've heard."



MILES HAYFORD | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon University professor Eric Hall speaks at the ABSS Board meeting on April 28. Hall was appointed in a 4-2 ruling to fill the vacant seat on the board at the meeting.

## CORRECTIONS

There are no corrections from the last edition of The Pendulum.





ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR

Attendees throw hundreds of fake flowers and petals during the Holi celebration on April 25 in Numen Lumen. The event, which is typically held outdoors to throw colored powder, was moved inside due to predicted bad weather. Holi is a Hindu festival of color, love and spring and traditionally marks the start of spring and the triumph of good over evil.



KATHAN GANDHI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Junior Veljko Krstic leads the Elon University men’s tennis team in a pregame huddle before the CAA semifinal match versus Monmouth on April 26. The team lost in the championship to University of North Carolina, Wilmington on April 27.



ANJOLINA FANTARONI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon sophomore Sophie Remisio, an Elon Eco-Rep sustainability intern, poses with an Earth head at Earth Fest on April 24 in Young Commons. Elon’s weeklong celebrations for Earth Week aimed to highlight both the challenges and possibilities of sustainability, while giving students, faculty and staff new ways to engage with the environment and each other, according to Associate Director of Sustainability for Education and Outreach Kelly Harer. “This is really a time to explore how we support the Earth and each other,” Harer said. “It’s also a chance to showcase the great work already happening on campus and in the community.”



TRISTA PANAGAKOS | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

From left, North Carolina Democratic Party Chair Anderson Clayton, U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy, U.S. Rep. Maxwell Alejandro Frost and state Minority Leader Robert Reives speak at The People’s Town Hall at Haw River Ballroom on April 24. The People’s Town Hall — a Democratic campaign — is a reaction to congressional Republicans being advised to not hold in-person town hall meetings in their districts by North Carolina’s 9th Congressional District Rep. Richard Hudson in a closed door meeting on March 4. “I really wanted to bring people to rural North Carolina and I wanted to bring the people’s town hall to a place where you don’t normally find,” Clayton said. “Even though they’ve been doing it across the country, I feel like it’s been in other bigger places versus coming out to a red rural county and saying, ‘No, we’re gonna show up even here.’”



ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR

Kopper Top Leader in Community Service sophomore Julia Swartz tries to hold back Marcie the dog during the Peer EARS collaboration event with Kopper Top Life Learning Center on April 25 at Medallion Plaza. The event was meant to bring attention to the organizations and its services while providing community members the opportunity to interact with animals.



# ‘Theater in its rawest form’

## Student-written, produced play explores nuances of female friendships

Story and photos by Sarah T. Moore



From left, assistant director sophomore Parker Bowen and director senior Marina Jansen take notes as the cast of “Sororophobia” rehearse April 6 outside the Center for the Arts.

The term sororophobia refers to a woman’s simultaneous desire for and recoil from identification with other women. It encompasses the nuances of women who seek community with one another while comparing themselves to each other. It’s also the name of senior Laney Lynch’s second full-length play.

For Lynch, sororophobia is not some distant academic, feminist theory. It’s something she’s lived through and confronted in both herself and the people around her. Lynch said her playwriting professor would tell the class, “Write what you know.” And Lynch knows sororophobia.

“I found enough love in myself that I was comfortable enough to share that with an audience,” Lynch said.

“Sororophobia” will have performances at 7:30 p.m. May 2 and May 3, as well as 2 p.m. May 3, in the Center for the Arts Black Box Theatre.

Lynch, a B.F.A. acting student, began writing the play in fall 2023. It started as an idea and writing scenes of dialogue every now and then. But with encouragement from her friends, Lynch decided to write “Sororophobia,” a full-length, supernatural play about a group of middle school girls who summon a wish-granting demon.

The characters are in middle school because, as the demon says in the play, “no one is scarier than middle school girls.”

It’s an ensemble piece, meaning there is no distinct main character. Lynch said it was important to her that the five girls and the demon were all complex, thought-out characters with their own motivations and viewpoints.

“It’s not the emotions that make middle school girls scary,” Lynch said. “It’s what they choose to do with those emotions.”

Senior cast member Aniya Arnold said she values how Lynch’s writing and storytelling explores the reasoning behind the each character’s decisions. Especially for productions like “Sororophobia” that center women and LGBTQ+ people, Arnold said it’s important to present authentic stories and dynamics.

“Adding context to the decisions that we make is a privilege that a lot of people get, but that we don’t necessarily get,” Arnold said. “We get chastised for any decision that we make with no context attached to it.”

Arnold plays Elena, a 13-year-old girl who often seems bratty or insincere. She’s the leader of the girls’ friend group, but she’s been hiding her chronic illness from her friends.

Senior Sitare Sadeghi remembers the first

time Lynch told them about the play. The two were studying abroad in London, where Lynch was taking a playwriting class. As she wrote different scenes, they would host readings of it in their dorm room where Sadeghi and Lynch’s other friends encouraged her to keep developing the play.

Now, Sadeghi will be performing as Jasmine, a sassy and closeted 13-year-old who just wants to be included.

“She’s really just trying to give the people she loves all the love she can give them,” Sadeghi said.

From those initial nights in their dorm to a staged reading at Elon’s Queer Arts Festival last spring to the upcoming independently-produced performances, Sadeghi has seen how “Sororophobia” has brought her friends and peers together.

“This is theater in its rawest form, and it’s just so cool to see these young adults so passionate about work, about this story that we’ve all dealt with,” Sadeghi said. “We literally relate to this story.”

When it was time to bring Lynch’s script to life in the CFA Black Box, everyone brought their own ideas and unique skill sets to the production. From upholstery to woodwork to makeup, the “Sororophobia” team worked

together to make Lynch’s play the best it could be.

“I didn’t make a ‘GoFundMe’ — I didn’t go door-to-door — to just let this be an OK show,” Lynch said.

“

I DIDN’T MAKE A ‘GOFUNDME’  
— I DIDN’T GO DOOR-TO-DOOR  
— TO JUST LET THIS BE AN OK  
SHOW.

LANEY LYNCH  
“SOROROPHOBIA” PLAYWRIGHT

Lynch’s “GoFundMe” campaign raised \$1,530 that went toward set pieces, props, costumes and other production expenses. Most student-run shows at Elon are produced by a student organization and receive funding through the Student Government Association.

Tickets for “Sororophobia” are free and are available online at Sororophobia.Ludus.com.



The cast of “Sororophobia” rehearse the demon summoning scene March 30 in the CFA Black Box and April 13 in Roberts Theatre. The staging of the scene has changed as the play continues to be workshoped throughout rehearsals over the past three months and leading up to opening night May 2. The chairs would later be replaced by a fuzzy, pink ottoman and the cast members will use a Ouiji board and pass around a large spellbook made of cardboard.



“Sororophobia” cast members listen to feedback from senior Marina Jansen and sophomore Parker Bowen — the director and assistant director, respectively — during April 6 rehearsal. Bowen said it was both daunting and thrilling to work on an independent production that did not have a faculty adviser giving them feedback and helping secure resources.



“Sororophobia” playwright and senior Laney Lynch also plays the demon, BB Jr., in the play. Lynch sits in the CFA Black Box on April 27, so the crew can plan the lighting for one of BB Jr.’s speeches to the audience.



Seniors Caleb Ford, Sitare Sadeghi, Laney Lynch and freshman Jaden Carlisle work together to measure and cut wood planks April 22. The wood was used to build the play’s set pieces.



From left, sophomore Janae Willock, senior Aniya Arnold, sophomore Ella Schultz and freshman Maya Max sit on the main set piece in “Sororophobia” during rehearsal April 27. Admin producer and junior Zane Miller re-upholstered the ottoman specifically for the show.



Senior Aniya Arnold reviews her script outside the Center for the Arts during rehearsal April 6. Arnold, who plays Elena, said she’s found her “Sororophobia” experience as the play focuses on the experiences of women and LGBTQ+ people.



“SOROROPHOBIA”  
TICKETS



When deciding on props and costumes to use for “Sororophobia,” the production team wanted to embrace their nostalgia of the 2010s — when many of the cast and crew would’ve been in middle school. Props in “Sororophobia” include Silly Bandz, pipe cleaners, a Rainbow Loom kit, a boom box and colorful drawstring bags.



# A lynching remembered, a legacy reclaimed

## OUTLAW | from cover

She said out of all the lynching victims, Outlaw is the most well known due to his extraordinary life, and they try to use his story to educate the community regarding Alamance County’s difficult racial past.

“We try to make sure that the community knows that there were these other two racial terror lynchings that also took place in Alamance County,” Campbell said. “We use the story of Wyatt Outlaw to help bring more awareness of our history of racial terror in Alamance County.”

“

IT’S ONE PERSPECTIVE OF HISTORY AND WE’RE HERE TO TELL A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE OF ONE THAT WE BELIEVE IS MORE FACTUAL, WHICH IS THE STORY OF WHAT HAPPENED TO THESE LYNCHING VICTIMS.

LOY CAMPBELL  
COALITION MEMBER

Merritt said doesn’t really know why his family never talked about Outlaw, but he knows the topic was painful for his grandmother to speak about.

### Across the street

There is a law firm located in a bright blue building on the corner of Elm Street.

Outlaw’s lynching happened right where the firm stands 155 years ago.

The coalition got special permission from the owner to go under the building and collect dirt of where Outlaw was lynched. Every year at the vigil, attendees can place dirt from lynching locations into the jars with the three victims’ names labeled on the containers.

The jars currently sit at the Alamance African-American Cultural Arts and History

Center as a reminder to those who pay a visit to the museum. Museum manager James Shields said several men were being lynched almost every day in the U.S. during the reconstruction era after the Civil War.

“Beginning with the end of reconstruction into 1920, there was this solidification of white supremacy and basically disenfranchisement of Black men,” Shields said. “These jars represent that.”

According to Shields, no one really knows what happened once Outlaw was lynched, or what happened to his children and family members in 1870.

“I think it’s so important because we all don’t get the opportunity to learn more about our families, either because they’re gone or in some cases, they just don’t want to talk about it,” Shields said.

Across the street from where Outlaw was murdered lies a Confederate soldier statue right outside the Graham Courthouse. In March of 2024, the North Carolina Court of Appeals ruled in favor of preserving the monument. After years of the National Association for Advancement of Colored People and other plaintiffs fighting for its removal, the court ruled it not be taken down due to North Carolina’s Monument Protection law. This law states that no monument can be removed without orders from the North Carolina Historical Commission. In addition, the justices also argued that the Confederate army is a form of military service to be recognized.

The monument was originally requested by the Alamance County Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1912 to be created. Yet around 100 yards away lies a history untold within Graham — a history of racial terror.

Now the coalition is on a mission to establish its own monument within Alamance County to commemorate Outlaw and the other victims.

“The confederate monument is just one part of history,” Campbell said. “It’s one perspective of history and we’re here to tell a different perspective of one that we believe is more factual, which is the story of what happened to these lynching victims.”

Merritt said he wishes there was a monument to honor Outlaw. But, he said he is thrilled that the coalition is taking steps to preserve Outlaw’s name.

“We are seeing a very clear effort to erase history, to not tell history, to leave out all types



LILLY MOLINA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Samuel Merritt stands on the corner where his great-great grandfather Wyatt Outlaw was lynched on April 25.

of diversity from our society now and from our historical record,” Campbell said.

With the Trump administration just passing its 100 days in office, there have been rollbacks within diversity, equity and inclusion. At the end of March, Trump signed an executive order that targets programs and orders to remove any “improper ideology” and primarily affects Smithsonian museums. The National Museum of African American History and Culture has already begun this process with the removal of some artifacts.

In addition, the Trump administration has recently pulled federal funding from universities that have continued to support DEI programs. For example the Trump Administration has frozen \$2 billion dollars in federal funding towards Harvard University after they refused the government’s terms.

“If you don’t fight and keep the refrigerator going, then things will go bad,” Merritt said, referring to the U.S. as the kitchen appliance. “That’s the way our society is.”

Merritt said he looks to Outlaw during these current political times. He said Outlaw was someone who “stood up for good” within

Graham, and Merritt gets passionate about the current political landscape.

“I get fired up about that,” Merritt said. “My daughters get fired up about that. You need to fight sometimes.”

### The spirit of Wyatt Outlaw

Merritt remembers reading about lynchings in history books but could have never imagined that his family would have been affected. The Vietnam veteran and retired microbiologist can only feel proud of his ancestor.

“I’m proud although his body and remains are someplace,” Merritt said. “As a family member I don’t know where I can go to pay homage to him.”

Yet Merritt said Outlaw’s spirit lives on thanks to the coalition and several community members, and he is inspired by them everyday.

“What happened with Wyatt, the historical impact as well as the effect that has had on the community, Jesus Christ was among us,” Merritt said. “He died but he was resurrected, came back to dwell among us. Wyatt died, didn’t come back, but his spirit still lives more than 150 years ago.”

# Community reacts to nationwide statement, Elon’s absence

## AACU | from cover

Andrew Monteith, Elon professor of religious studies, said it makes sense for Harvard, the wealthiest university in the world, to be able to fight this battle. Harvard has a \$53.2 billion endowment, and Elon’s endowment stood at \$367 million in fall 2024.

“They are absolutely trying to dictate what

is or is not acceptable,” Monteith said. “Course content, it’s a wild overreach for the office of the president. Harvard has the money to fight that in court. We’re doing OK, but we’re not Harvard.”

Brett Cooper ’05 said when he first saw the AACU statement he immediately scrolled to the bottom to search for Elon and President Connie Book’s name. When he didn’t see either listed his first reaction was disappointment, he said.

“I was just disappointed given where the attacks that we were seeing against colleges and academic freedom right now,” Cooper said. “Reading what the statement was like, it felt very much in line with where I would want Elon to be.”

Cooper said after seeing the range of schools that were included on the list he was more frustrated to not find Elon included. Eight out of Elon’s 15 peer institutions signed onto the statement.

“Seeing them on this list, and seeing Elon apparently not selectively deciding we didn’t want to stick our neck out there — it was disappointing,” Cooper said.

Monteith said at Elon he feels the role faculty members play is different from the role of administrators, as a university president is someone who has to answer to many more individuals — including students, parents, faculty and the Board of Trustees.

“I don’t know that faculty and Connie Book have to play the same roles,” Monteith said. “I feel that my own job requires me to one, to

not be silenced just because the government wants us to stop talking about things that’s a foundational principle of academic freedom.”

Kirk said as someone working in higher education, he is concerned about many ways that the federal government has been involved with issues within higher education. He said he is specifically concerned about his coworker who’s \$250,000 federal grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities was revoked last month and cuts within science, technology, engineering and math fields.

Kirk participated in Elon’s Day of Action “teach-in” event hosted by Elon’s chapter of American Association of University Professors. During his session, he read from the books “On Tyranny” and “On Freedom” by Timothy Snyder. He said one section he read focused on authoritarian governments, focusing on Europe.

“The lesson for that particular entry is, do not obey and advance,” Kirk said. “Because when you do, you essentially teach the powerful how far they can push.”

Kirk said he did not know what decisions went into different universities’ decisions to sign or not this statement — but thought the message of the statement was important to be shared with the public.

“I do think that collective statements and more importantly collective action by university leaders is just essential in this critical moment facing American higher ed,” Kirk said. “But institutional autonomy is also

an important academic value and campuses face both similar and unique situations.”

Cooper said while he wasn’t sure what, if any, impact this statement would have on public policy — the message it is sending to have colleges unite together is something people notice.

“An attack on one schools academic independence and attack on its students and professors is an attack on all of academia,” Cooper said.

Signatories from North Carolina college presidents include Wake Forest University, Davidson College, Duke University and Warren Wilson College.

“Our colleges and universities share a commitment to serve as centers of open inquiry where, in their pursuit of truth, faculty, students, and staff are free to exchange ideas and opinions across a full range of viewpoints without fear of retribution, censorship, or deportation,” leaders wrote in the statement.

The AACU is continuing to accept signatures from current leaders of colleges, universities and scholarly societies.

Monteith said as it’s not clear yet what action this statement will bring, if any, it makes it harder to know what the best course of action is — but as an individual he feels it is necessary for him to share his beliefs.

“I feel compelled to speak on issues that matter to me, which, right now, I think the government is behaving in essentially fascist, restrictive ways,” Monteith said. “And so I don’t mind saying that in public.”



ERIN MARTIN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon professor of political science and public policy Jason Kirk asks a question during Elon University’s chapter of the American Association of University Professors nationwide Day of Action on April 17. Kirk was one of 13 Elon professors who presented throughout the day.





# ROCKET LEAGUE SPARKS CONNECTION AT ELON



PHOTO SOURCE: PSYONIX

Esports team connects through love of the game, sees competitive success

**Erin Martin**  
Elon News Network

When sophomore Ryan Voisard came to Elon University as a freshman, he wasn't just looking for strong academics. He was searching for a way to meet people, get involved and pursue a passion that had been part of his life for years.

"I wanted to find something more fun to do," Voisard said. "I was looking at all the intramural sports and I saw esports, and I was like, 'Wait, I love playing video games. I'll try it out.'"

What he didn't expect was that he'd end up rebuilding Elon's Rocket League team nearly from scratch and leading it to one of its best seasons yet.

Rocket League is a popular video game that blends soccer with rocket-powered cars. Developed by Psyonix and first released in 2015, the game is played in teams of typically three players and after a five minute match the team with the most goals wins. Over the past year, Rocket League has had a monthly average of about 17,925 players, according to Steam data.

At the time, the team was just three players — Voisard and two graduating seniors.

"It was just three of us, which was just barely enough for a team," Voisard said. "We actually even made it to this one champions shore tournament. We didn't do well, but we made it. It was so much fun just going off campus to play in the tournament."

When the seniors graduated, Voisard stepped up.

"I got an email saying, 'We need someone to be a lead. You're the

only one left.' So I stepped up to the plate," Voisard said.

Now a sophomore, Voisard has grown the team to nine members, even competing in various tournaments and seeing success.

Founded in 2015, Elon's esports scene has been growing steadily over the past few years, along with the rest of the world. According to Statista research published August 2024, the global reach in the esports market is forecasted to continuously increase between 2025 and 2029 and reach an estimated 896.03 million users.

The university's esports program offers both casual gaming hours, where students can come and play for fun, as well as a competitive structure for those looking to represent Elon in tournaments. Each year, the club forms teams based on interest for other popular titles such as League of Legends, Overwatch, Rainbow Six: Siege and Super Smash Bros.

Voisard wasted no time moving up the team from a regular member to captain. Rather than letting the Rocket League program fizzle out, he took on the responsibility of keeping it alive.

He began recruiting aggressively — at club fairs, around campus and even randomly walking up to students he thought might be interested.

That's how freshman team member Nick Daccurso was recruited.

"He called me out, said I looked like I played video games," Daccurso said.

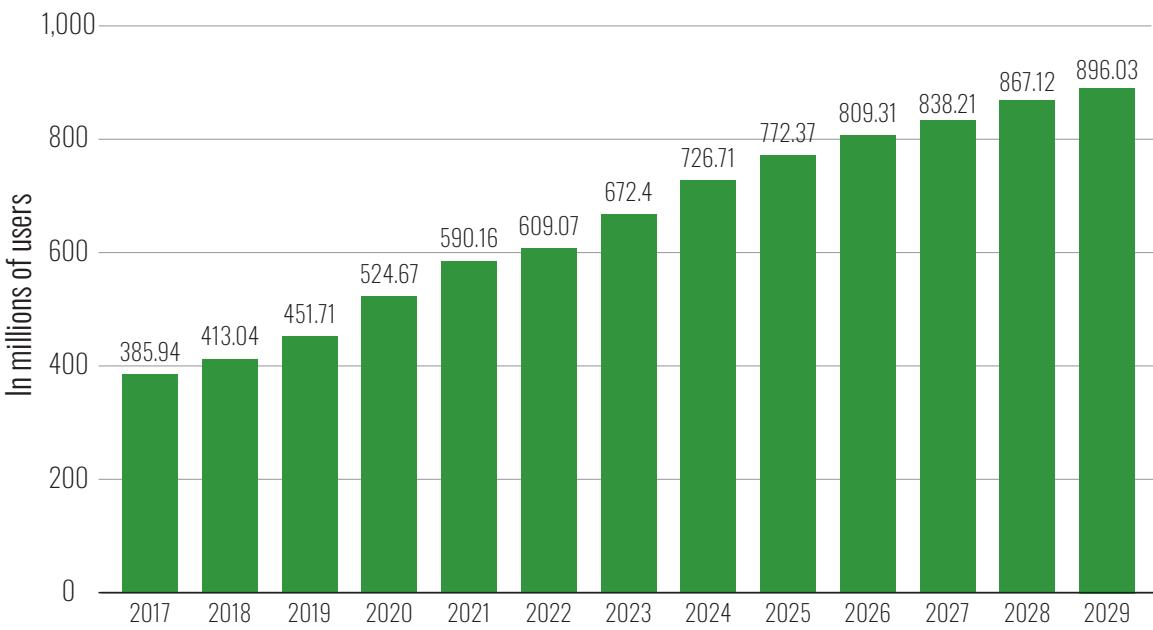
Freshman Ian Kirk had a different path: he had researched Elon's esports programs before even arriving on campus, researching Elon's different teams, ultimately ending with Rocket League.

"It was the only game that I really actively played," Kirk said.

Rocket League practices are

## Number of esports users worldwide

Global esports audience projected to hit 896 million users by 2029.



SOURCE: STATISTA MARKET INSIGHTS

DATA VISUALIZATION BY ERIN MARTIN

structured similarly to traditional sports, Voisard said.

"It's kind of like soccer practice," Voisard said. "We'll play a few matches. We'll look over some film."

Voisard grew up playing soccer, following in the footsteps of his father, who had played in college before multiple ACL tears ended his athletic career. When Rocket League launched in 2015, it quickly became a new way for them to share the sport they both loved.

Voisard stopped playing soccer in 2020, due to COVID-19, and Rocket League filled the gap.

"It was a smooth transition," Voisard said. "I just stayed home and played Rocket League. We weren't good at all, but we were having fun every night."

That personal connection — between the real soccer field and the virtual arena — made Rocket

League even more meaningful for Voisard.

For Daccurso, the appeal of Rocket League came from the unique blend of teamwork, strategy and mechanical skill. He's been playing since 2016 and said the experience of practicing and improving with teammates at Elon has made the game even more rewarding.

"I think it's safe to say that I enjoy coming to practice just to, like, fool around, because obviously we're getting better at the game by playing," Daccurso said. "We have definitely gotten better since we got here, but it's fun to just play with my friends."

This year marked a major step forward for Elon's Rocket League program. The team competes under the Collegiate Carball Association and played in a Collegiate Conference

Series tournament with other schools from the Coastal Athletic Association.

"We played in the CAA conference — beat North Carolina A&T and then we lost to Northeastern, but we made third overall in the conference," Voisard said.

They also participated in the ZCL — a community based, independently managed tournament. There, Elon dominated the competition, sweeping through the bracket to take home the championship title.

Most of Elon's players are ranked Grand Champion — one tier below the highest possible competitive rank in Rocket League. Voisard said team chemistry and communication have been their biggest assets, especially when playing against other universities' top players.

"Communication is so vital. You get used to communicating without speaking sometimes," Voisard said.

For now, the team is focused on continuing to grow. Voisard recently won reelection as team captain for next year and has plans for how to elevate the program.

"This year was focused on quantity, really getting numbers so we can compete in tournaments and just stay as a team," Voisard said. "Next year we're going to blow everyone out of the water, and senior year? Number one."

More than the wins, the players said what they value the most is the community they've built together. Before every practice, the players meet up for dinner and often hang out after. They traveled together to University of North Carolina, Wilmington earlier this year for an in-person competition — a rare and exciting experience for a game that's usually played online, Kirk said.

"Video games are typically an online thing, so I never really gotten to go somewhere to play video games," Kirk said.



Elon sophomore and esports team captain Ryan Voisard plays rocket league with Elon freshmen Nick Daccurso and Ian Kirk on April 24.

ERIN MARTIN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



# THE WAIT IS OVER

## ELON WOMEN'S TENNIS CLAIMS ITS FIRST-EVER CAA CROWN

Elon defeated 3-time defending champion William & Mary 4-2 on April 27 after a 19-5 season

**Miles Hayford**  
Elon News Network

Shiny golden confetti, a water cooler poured over head coach Elizabeth Anderson, grins from ear to ear, dancing and an exclamation of disbelief. Those were the scenes at Jimmy Powell Tennis Center in the early afternoon April 27.

Elon women's tennis had just broken through the juggernaut that was William & Mary, who won the past three Coastal Athletic Association Championships. The Phoenix beat William & Mary 4-2 in the CAA Championship, capturing its first ever CAA Championship in program history. Anderson expressed respect for the Tribe's dominant run after Elon's victory.

"William & Mary has a really good program, and we've always had a lot of really good matches with them," Anderson said. "I have a lot of respect for them and their coaches and today we were just really focusing on doing the best we could."

Elon's historic season began way before its win on Sunday. It was a wildly successful season all around for the Phoenix as it went 19-5 and went undefeated in conference play. It started the season off strong by winning its first three games, but dropped its first loss against Wake Forest, losing 7-0. The team continued the season and found success on the court. Sophomores Mariana Reding and Simone Bergeron were standouts at No. 1 doubles, going 16-3 together in the regular season and were named CAA Doubles Team of the Week in the season's opening week. Elon ended the regular season on a six-match win streak.

Elon entered the CAA Tournament as the No. 1 seed — the first time in program history. Additionally, Elon was hosting the tournament for the seventh time, setting up the opportunity to make history in front of its fans.

As the top seed, Elon earned a bye into the semifinals. On April 26, it faced off against the College of Charleston in the semifinals and won 4-0. The day started with doubles as Reding and Bergeron dominated, winning 6-0 in just 25 minutes.

The No. 2 doubles team of freshman Lisa Kranec and junior Helen Sarikulaya underwent a smorgasbord of ups and downs in their match. They started off by going up 3-0 but quickly allowed Charleston to storm back in it as Charleston won three straight games to tie it up. Charleston's momentum carried them forward as they broke Sarikulaya's serve and won their fifth straight



MILES HAYFORD | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Sophomore Simone Bergeron lets out a scream after winning a point during her doubles win against Charleston in the CAA Semifinals on April 26.



MILES HAYFORD | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Elon women's tennis team celebrates winning its first CAA Championship on April 27 after beating William & Mary.

game to go up 5-3. A packed Jimmy Powell Tennis Center full of Elon supporters helped cheer the Elon duo back in it as they won two games in a row to tie it at 5-5. Sarikulaya said the comeback arose from them trying to focus on the present.

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**ELIZABETH ANDERSON**  
ELON WOMEN'S TENNIS HEAD COACH

"I told my partner, Lisa, to just do our plays, everything that we worked on, and just put our heart out into this match and just do what you can control in the moment," Sarikulaya said.

The match was pushed to a tiebreak and Elon surged forward, winning the tiebreak quickly, securing the doubles point for Elon.

Anderson was proud of the duo's resilience and fight throughout the match.

"I'm so proud of the way that they fought through it, and it was just an entire team effort; everybody was cheering for each other and super excited and pumped up," Anderson said. "They just have this will and determination. They were just willing to find a way to get it done."

Reding and freshman Heidi Bulger both found their rhythm quickly as the singles matches began. Their wins along with junior Madison Cordisco's victory secured the win for Elon. It advanced Elon to its second CAA Championship in history. Its last championship was in 2022 where Elon lost to William & Mary.

The rematch was set, but it was bound to go differently this time. No one on the 2022 squad remained at Elon, and this time Elon was the favorite riding high with confidence and swagger. Elon had beat the Tribe just eight days prior in its regular season finale. Sarikulaya was confident going into the match.

"We're going to just go out there and play with our hearts and try to make history," Sarikulaya said after the teams

win over Charleston.

The championship match on Sunday started with doubles, and Elon captured the doubles point quickly.

Singles was another story, however. Singles was a grueling, two-hour affair that saw numerous matches go to a deciding third set. Elon needed to win three out of the six matches to clinch the victory.

Bergeron faced off against William & Mary's Hedda Gurholt in No. 1 singles in what was likely the match of the tournament. The two of them put on a show, illustrating three incredible sets of pure tennis excellence.

"It was an insane match," Bergeron said. "Constant ups and downs, but I just tried to grit through, trusted all of my training this year, and just got the support from my teammates and just got it done at the end of day."

Much of the match took place at the baseline as Bergeron and Gurholt exchanged powering, searing groundstrokes in lengthy rallies. Endurance was crucial as both opponents tried to outlast each other.

"We conditioned more than we ever had, and it paid off unbelievably," Bergeron said. "On a hot day like this, it's so crucial that we're able to hang in the long rallies like that. I'm prone to cramping, so I was just taking pickle juice shots on the side, trying to not cramp."

“

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**SIMONE BERGERON**  
ELON TENNIS SOPHOMORE

Bergeron captured the first set 6-4, but Gurholt wore her down in the second set, evening it out. Bulger cruised to a 6-2, 6-0 victory while William & Mary captured wins at No. 2 and No. 3 singles, tying the overall score at 2-2. Each team needed to win two out

of the three matches still going, which were all in a final, deciding set. With a win at No. 6 singles by Kranec, the championship relied on the rackets of Cordisco at No. 5 singles and Bergeron.

After two tough sets, Bergeron had found her rhythm in the third, going up by 5-2 by attacking from the baseline with ferocity. She employed a tricky mix of cross court and down the line shots to keep Gurholt on her toes. Gurholt's service game pushed it to 5-3, where Gurholt broke Bergeron's chance to serve for the championship. At 5-4, Bergeron pounced and clinched the championship with a 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 win.

She immediately dropped the ground in shock and happiness as her teammates rushed toward her, engulfing her in a group hug. They jumped up and down, shedding tears of celebration. Minutes later, the trophy ceremony ensued and senior Miray Konar lifted the trophy high above her head, eliciting cheers from the Elon fans. Bergeron and her teammates ran towards the crowd and hugged members of the Elon women's soccer team who had come to support their fellow student-athletes. Konar expressed disbelief as CAA Commissioner Joe D'Antonio handed her the trophy.

"I can't believe I'm actually holding this," Konar screamed.

After the festivities died down, Bergeron said it still felt like a dream.

"It still hasn't quite hit me that we just won conference," Bergeron said with a smile that refused to go away. "It's unreal, it's actually crazy. We've worked for years and this season has been like a roller coaster of wins and losses."

Anderson said that getting to make history at home made it even more special.

"They deserve this so much, and so I'm so proud of them," Anderson said. "It's a really special moment right now to be able to do this at Elon too, it means so much to me."

Although the season isn't over as Elon will now play the University of Tennessee in the NCAA Tournament on May 2, the win on Sunday certainly had all the feelings of reaching a peak. It was the pinnacle of the last 10 years of Anderson's time coaching Elon while they were in the CAA. When asked to sum up the team in a few words, Bergeron chose the word "unbelievable."

"I love them with all of my heart. We all love each other," Bergeron said. "They're fighters. Every single one of us is a fighter and we're out there all day supporting each other."