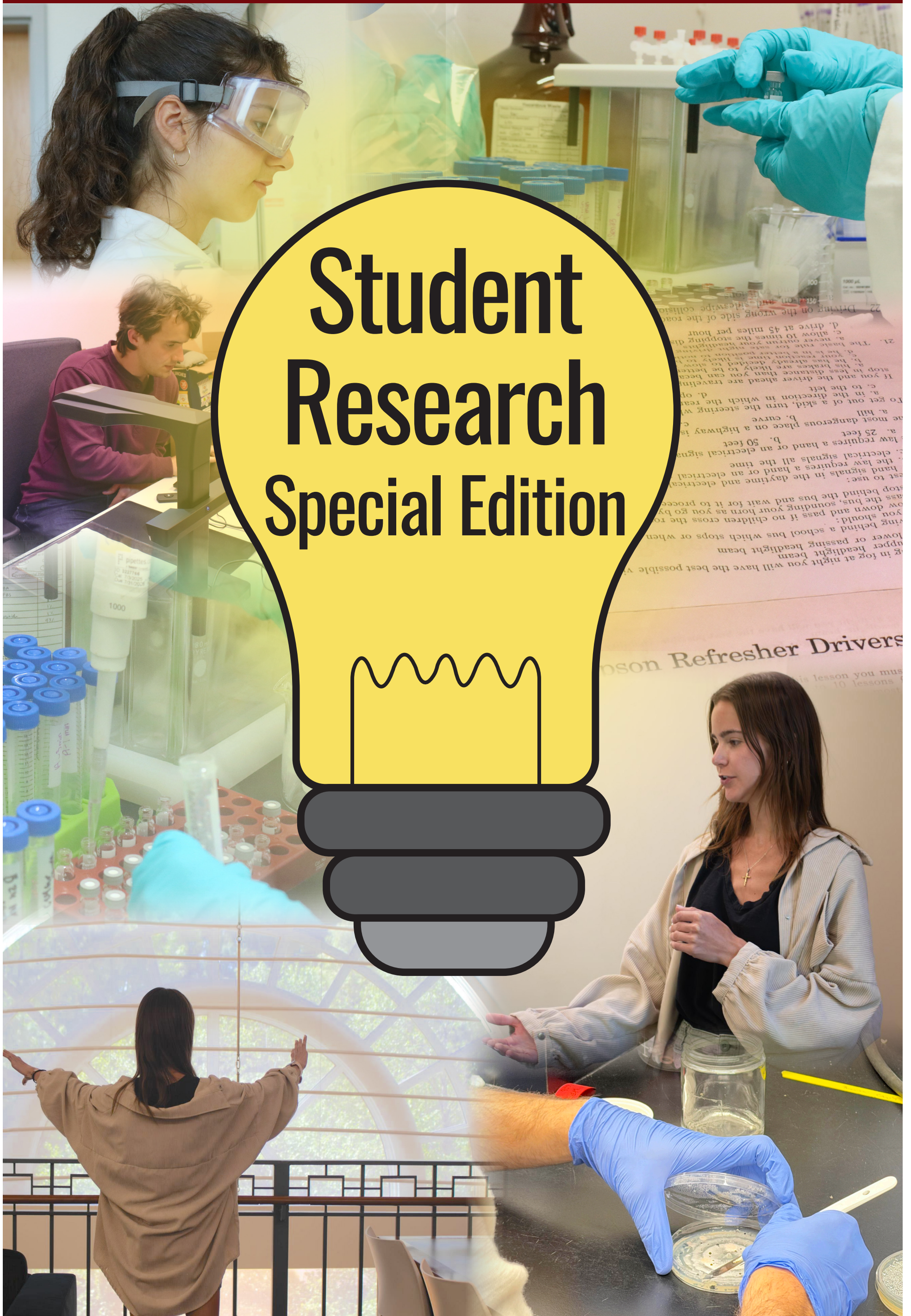


# THE PENDULUM

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## Student Research Special Edition

THE PENDULUM

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CORRECTIONS

An article titled "Elon Law works to combat rising law school costs" in the April 8 edition of The Pendulum incorrectly stated that Elon Law is the only 2 and a half year law school program in the country.

An article titled "AI poster competition sparks conversations across campus" in the April 8 edition of The Pendulum incorrectly stated that the Pew Research Center was involved with creating Elon's Imagining the Digital Future Center.

Elon News Network regrets these errors.

Research can enrich, shape academic journeys

Alumni say lab experience, faculty mentorship influence career paths

Anjolina Fantaroni  
Elon News Network

Aoife Judge '24 wants to become a doctor. After getting her undergraduate degree in biochemistry, Judge is currently studying at New York Medical College for her master's degree.

"You need about 500 research hours to apply to medical school to be, quote-unquote, a competitive applicant," Judge said. "It was really easy to get those research hours at Elon."

Not knowing how to get involved with research when first coming to Elon, Judge said the first step she needed to take was to ask.

"Then you ask, and everyone jumps into action," Judge said.

For her research, she studied in wet labs and looked at different cancer cells. She said at Elon, it is interesting that students approach professors with their research ideas — and in her case, her mentor, Victoria Moore, knew the ins and outs of her project.

"I got to do collateral sensitivity, which is basically looking at different drugs, like chemo drugs when it comes to cancers, and seeing if I use them together, separately or different combinations, how they work better or worse," Judge said.

Judge said Elon allowed her to work in several labs without worrying about the funding side of her research because Elon helped raise money for her project.

"Because research is so expensive, and it was really good to develop those skills and see how they raised the money and got the grants and this, that, the other," Judge said. "To do this research without having to have the pressure to do it yourself, especially in this day and age when money for science is a little bit hard to come by."

However, aside from the funding, Judge said she is most grateful for the support of the Elon chemistry professors.

"The offices for all the professors, their doors were always open," Judge said. "When my professor, Dr. Moore, wasn't there, I could pop into someone else and say, 'Hey, can you help me with this?'"

Elon has five Experimental Learning Requirements: volunteer service, internships, global engagement, leadership and mentored research. Each student must complete at least two of these experiences to graduate.

For the 2025-26 school year, 26% of



COURTESY OF KALEY KATZ

Kaley Katz '24 investigates the role of the ASXL1 and ASXL2 proteins in leukemic cell lines in a lab in McMichael Science Center as part of her undergraduate research.

undergraduate students have completed research throughout their time at Elon. Students can get the research ELR by either enrolling in one credit hour in a course numbered 4998 or 4999 or by participating in the Summer Undergraduate Research Experience.

With the highly-mentored research projects comes a staff behind them.

Justin Clar, director of Undergraduate Research, said the staff and himself work to oversee several different projects, such as the actual research, taking large groups of students to the National Conference for Undergraduate Research, SURE and the Spring Undergraduate Research Forum.

"We do all kinds of workshops to help new faculty learn how to be good mentors," Clar said. "We provide grants for students to support their research in terms of travel or supplies."

Without doing undergraduate research at the University of Richmond, Clar said he would never have become a faculty member at Elon.

"As I did more and more research, I found myself wanting to have more impacts across the campus," Clar said.

Clar said there are many reasons for students to do undergraduate research, especially because in classes, students learn

about a subject. However, Clar said, when students do research, they are actively involved in creating new knowledge in a subject.

"The experience of undergraduate research is providing you with the career readiness you can talk about in an interview, either for graduate school or jobs or fellowships, whatever else you're doing," Clar said.

Clar said he understands that some students may think beginning research can be scary, but he agrees with Judge — asking is the best and first step to get involved.

"The easiest thing to do is just ask somebody, 'What's your research like? What do you do?' And then you can maybe find a way that you can collaborate," Clar said.

Kaley Katz '24 started her research as a sophomore through the Elon College Fellows program. This is a 4-year merit-based scholarship program that requires students to achieve undergraduate research within Elon's College of Arts and Sciences.

In spring 2022, Katz was selected as an Elon Lumen Scholar — the top undergraduate research award at Elon, which helped her fund her studies in investigating the role of ASXL1 and ASXL2 proteins in leukemic cell lines.

Elon sophomores submit an application for the Lumen Prize during their spring semester. Each application must include the students' plans for the future, specifically their vision for research, service projects or coursework. Scholars who receive the prize receive \$20,000 to fund their projects.

Now, Katz is working as a genetic counseling assistant at Duke Cancer Center, but she's in the process of applying to graduate schools to receive her master's in genetic counseling.

"Having some undergraduate research under my belt is super helpful going into a thesis for my master's," Katz said. "Within my undergraduate research, I was able to present that research both as a presentation, orally and as a poster presentation."

According to Katz, her research went in unexpected directions. She said that things don't always go to plan.

"You learn a lot throughout the process and how to adapt and shift your research as your data presents itself," Katz said.

One thing that Clar said he hears from upperclassmen is that they wish they had begun research sooner.

"They get these great ideas, but they end up graduating and they can't finish all their work," Clar said. "So if you start earlier, then you have the ability to really dig deep into some problems."

SURF Day hits record number of submissions

Annual research forum will have 387 participants across posters, presentations April 28

Fiona McAllister  
Elon News Network

Elon University's Spring Undergraduate Research Forum has hit a record number of submissions this year, with 387 participants. The forum will be held April 28. There are no campus activities or classes

during this full day of research presentations.

Associate Director of the undergraduate research program Jennifer Hamel has spent the past three years at Elon helping with SURF Day. Hamel said SURF Day has expanded during her time and from what she has seen in the past.

"It's grown a ton over 30 years, and now it is this really robust annual celebration of all this hard work that these students do," Hamel said. "Hopefully, it's a culminating moment"

Hamel said all undergraduate schools at Elon are participating in SURF Day this year.

According to Elon's website, there are five steps to get your research approved. Students who have had their research approved have been working with a mentor throughout their research process.

"Building their relationship with the mentor who shows you how to do it," Hamel said. "These

things are very valuable."

SURF Day typically has two poster sessions where students present their research orally, along with creative performance presentations. Due to the high number of presentations this year, there will be three poster sessions. There will be 70 to 80 posters presented during each session, according to Hamel.



HOPEFULLY, IT'S A CULMINATING MOMENT.

JENNIFER HAMEL  
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF THE UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH PROGRAM

Hamel said SURF Day is a great way for students to grow professionally.

"That's what SURF is all about," Hamel said. "We know that they learn persistence and self-assessment and how to think critically and constructively."

**IF YOU GO**  
SURF Day April 28

SURF College Coffee  
8:15 a.m. - 10 a.m.  
Outdoor area in front of Alumni Gym (Rain location: Alumni Gym concourse)

Poster Session 1  
8:15 a.m. - 9:05 a.m.  
Alumni Gym

Poster Session 2  
9:10 a.m. - 10 a.m.  
Alumni Gym

Oral Sessions 1  
10:30 a.m. - noon  
Various campus locations

Oral Sessions 2  
12:45 p.m. - 2 p.m.  
Various campus locations

Oral Sessions 3  
2:20 p.m. - 3:35 p.m.  
Various campus locations

Poster Session 3  
4 p.m. - 4:50 p.m.  
Alumni Gym

Closing Reception  
4 p.m. - 4:50 p.m.  
Alumni Gym concourse



SURF DAY SCHEDULE COURTESY OF JENNIFER HAMEL

ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH T. MOORE

# Student digs into Burlington's past through local documents

Research efforts highlight prominent individuals in Burlington's history

Elissa Leka  
Elon News Network

The Rockefeller Integrated Hotel stood on Burlington's Maple Avenue before being demolished a few weeks ago. Created by McBride "Mack" Thompson, a prominent African American entrepreneur in the Jim Crow South, the hotel was both his home and a place for Black travelers to stay somewhere safe. A single box of papers was recovered from the demolition site by a neighbor.

Marshall Sears, a sophomore researching African American entrepreneurship in Petersburg, digitizes documents including those found in the demolition, as a part of his undergraduate research. Petersburg, a neighborhood in Burlington and is the focus of Sears's research due to its local significance and its rich history of African American entrepreneurship.

"I had the opportunity to research real American history, and not only that, but real old local history that's impactful to the local community and means something to a lot of people on an individual scale," Sears said.

Sears said his project has evolved since it has started. Originally, he had focused his attention on the demolition of Mack Thompson's hotel.

Thompson was a boxer and owned a hotel, nightclub and dance hall. He even provided private driving lessons to promote his used car business.

"The fact that he had so much impact on his community, and say and sway, was really incredible," Sears said. "He seemed to be this real central figure, particularly in the Petersburg community."

Sears used data collection and synthesis to build the narratives of historical figures. He did this by looking through old newspapers



ELISSA LEKA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER  
Sophomore Marshall Sears digitizes historical documents for further analysis and preservation April 8 in Lindner Hall.

from the 1900s into the late 1960s.

Sears previously used a newspaper archive, however experienced a "hiccup" in his research when it crashed. To continue working, he had to change his methods of data collection. He used city phone books and '50s and '60s research papers. Sears also started to reach out to local community leaders such as James Shields.

Shields, a manager at the African American Cultural Arts and History Center in Burlington, said studying African American entrepreneurship was important to shedding light on their success stories.

"It goes against a narrative out there that maybe African American communities did not and do not have entrepreneurs," Shields said.

Sears has now expanded his search to look at more entrepreneurs.

John and Dorothea Bahadur also owned a

nightclub in Petersburg, like Thompson. Sears said that during the '50s, the city of Burlington expanded roads through Maple Avenue, an example of systemic displacement, which meant the city took people's property for public use. Dorothea did not stand for this.

"She hugged herself to a tree and had to be forcefully pried from the tree and was arrested," Sears said. "It was really great because it's this person who's obviously connected with business and entrepreneurs, who's standing there for her community, even though she put herself at great risk at losing those things."

The researcher said he finds the work stressful, but a very fun challenge.

"In some ways you have to be a detective," Sears said. "It's super cool, like one of those 1950s noirs. You're drinking a cup of white coffee at a diner, kind of detective."

But more than that, Sears said he hopes his



ELISSA LEKA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER  
A shoebox of items recovered from McBride "Mack" Thompson's home before demolition.

research inspires people to take care of their local history.

"Support local history like the library in downtown Burlington who does not have a local historian," Sears said. "They don't have enough money to hire one, which is really unfortunate."

Shields emphasized the importance of this sentiment, especially in cases such as the Mack Thompson house demolition.

"Whoever purchased the Mack Thompson house either had no idea about the historical significance, or maybe they just didn't care," Shields said. "I hope that Marshall's research will shed some light on that and will encourage people to be more careful with our history."

## Teaching Fellow studies alternative teaching methods

Senior runs national surveys exploring how different schools approach outdoor, progressive learning

Megan Walsh  
Elon News Network

After stepping foot in a local elementary school's garden, Elon senior Grace Rasmussen said that's when she realized learning could be full of joy, and she knew she wanted to provide that for her future students.

Rasmussen, an Elon University Teaching Fellow, is now conducting two national surveys exploring how schools incorporate outdoor and progressive education practices. She has presented at several conferences, including the Growing School Gardens Summit and the American Educational Research Association conference. She will also present at Elon's Spring Undergraduate Research Forum on April 28.

Rasmussen said her research journey began as a freshman when she got a job with her future research mentor through the PACE program, which provides students in financial need with on-campus jobs when they start at Elon.

In her work for professor Scott Morrison, Rasmussen said she helped run garden clubs at Elon Elementary and Eastlawn Elementary.

"Once I went to garden club for the first time, it was kind of magical. I was like, 'Oh, learning can happen in joyous, fun ways, and school doesn't have to be like prison, and we can learn in good environments,'" Rasmussen said.

Morrison said when Rasmussen approached him in her sophomore year, he suggested doing the progressive study in addition to the survey on outdoor education she pitched to him.

"When we were looking into a study of school gardens or garden-based



COURTESY OF GRACE RASMUSSEN  
Grace Rasmussen teaches students during her semester abroad in New Zealand with the Elon Teaching Fellows in the Spring of 2024.

educators, I started talking about how teachers who take kids outside during the school day, you could consider what they do as pretty progressive and outside of the norm practice," Morrison said. "I asked her if she knew what progressive education was, and she said, 'No.'"

Morrison said progressive education can be defined differently by everyone

but focuses on breaking away from typical teaching methods, such as memorization and testing. He said this includes student-centered, project-based, experiential and inquiry-based values.

"Students generate questions. Students do field work. They can often get them out of the classroom and off campus," Morrison said. "Even in elementary school, they go places. They learn from people. They learn from books and things they can find online, but a lot of it is experiential."

Rasmussen and Morrison designed two national surveys, one on outdoor and garden-based learning and one on progressive education practices. Rasmussen said her project entails respondents filling out two surveys, and she conducts interviews with them.

Morrison advised Rasmussen to apply for a Lumen Prize, a \$20,000 award given to sophomores toward their research. Rasmussen said she worked on the proposal for and received the prize while spending the spring semester in New Zealand with the Teaching Fellows Project.

She said the semester abroad helped her see an international perspective on education, which helped her research.

"That was interesting to see, because they're outdoor learning and stuff is kind of built in even just the architecture of the schools," Rasmussen said. "Everything's very open, and there's not hallways. The buildings are just outside, the doors lead to outside and then there's a playground."

Coming back to Elon, Rasmussen said she and Morrison designed the surveys and sent them to teachers at progressive schools across the country. To continue data collection, Rasmussen completed the Summer Undergraduate Research Experience in 2025. Now she said she is in the interview part of her research.

All of Rasmussen's data will be used to compare how different schools view

outdoor and progressive education, Morrison said. He said this research comes at a time when there is a lot of discourse around education.

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THERE'S A LOT OF DISAGREEMENT ABOUT WHAT'S THE BEST PRACTICE IN EDUCATION.

SCOTT MORRISON  
EDUCATION PROFESSOR

"Education is political, and a lot of times you see very traditional schools have a particular political orientation, and then progressive schools often have a different kind of political orientation, and I mean politics very broadly," Morrison said. "There's a lot of disagreement about what's the best practice in education."

Rasmussen said the most interesting finding for her so far has been seeing the difference in how educational-minded teachers differ from nature-loving ones interact with students in garden education. She said she expected traditional teachers to be better at progressive practices, but said she has found that usually is not the case.

In doing this research, Rasmussen said she gained hope about the education profession.

"Being able to provide life-giving, fun ways of learning for those students is so crucial," Rasmussen said. "I feel more prepared seeing concrete examples of what I want to do versus not perpetuating the same harms that have been done in the past."



# Student tackles toxic water

MIA TORRES | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Junior Sophie Remisio works in a McMichael Science Center lab April 6 to remove PFAS.

Environmental engineering student makes impact by removing harmful chemicals from drinking water

**Mia Torres**  
Elon News Network

Every day, millions of Americans drink water laced with chemicals that never fully leave the environment. Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, known as PFAS, or “forever chemicals,” these compounds are linked to cancer and other serious health risks. They are nearly impossible to remove with conventional water treatment methods.

Sophie Remisio, a junior majoring in environmental engineering, is working toward a solution. She is developing a reusable filter designed to capture and safely dispose of PFAS.

“I always wanted to make a difference,” Remisio said. “When I learned environmental engineering existed, I realized it was the perfect way to create solutions for environmental problems.”

Her research focuses on using modified carbon nanotubes. She is testing ways to create a reusable filter that could dramatically reduce the presence of PFAS in drinking water.

“With this model, when the filter is fully saturated, you can pour a solution over it to remove the PFAS, then reuse the filter,” Remisio said.

She first became aware of PFAS through news reports about their presence in consumer products. Her concern deepened when she learned the chemicals had contaminated water around the world.

“I had read about PFAS casually through the news,” Remisio said. “There’s this stuff in products that I use that’s bad for me, and I realized it’s not just a consumer issue, but it’s a water issue.”

Before discovering environmental engineering, Remisio had considered environmental education as a major. She has always been passionate about the environment but wasn’t sure how to



MIA TORRES | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Junior Sophie Remisio looks at the labels of PFAS samples April 6 in McMichael Science Center.

make an impact until she found a major that combined science, engineering and environmental solutions.

“I always thought engineering was just like building bridges, and then I learned that it’s a lot more than that,” Remisio said. “I liked the pairing of environmental and engineering because I’m able to create solutions for environmental problems, and that felt like the right niche for me.”

Her research took off during an internship at the Duke University Center for Watershed Sciences. She initially worked on stormwater treatment before moving into PFAS projects, learning directly from experts in the field.

Remisio said she learned a lot from a research professor in the department of electrical and computer engineering at Duke University.

“She taught me a lot, and I realized I was really passionate about it, not just as a consumer, but as an engineer,” Remisio said.

She said research is as much about patience as it is about scientific discovery.

“A day in the lab can take several hours to run an experiment because you have to label everything individually and handle PFAS very carefully,” Remisio said.

Despite the challenges, Remisio remains motivated by the potential impact of her work.

“I remind myself of the importance of the work I’m doing,” Remisio said. “It’s easy to get caught in the monotony, but I’m doing this to hopefully make a difference in the world.”

Her mentor, Will Puer, an engineering professor at Elon, has guided her since her first year.

Puer said that she knew junior-level concepts before even coming to college.

“She was engaged and excited from the start,” Puer said.

Remisio began by assisting with ongoing research before moving to independent projects that aligned with her own interests.

Puer’s mentorship style is hands-off, allowing Remisio to develop her own research flow.

“We check in every couple of weeks,”

Puer said. “When we meet, she downloads everything she’s been working on. We troubleshoot snags, but mostly we focus on the big concepts and the science behind the data she’s seeing.”

He also praised her resilience during setbacks.

“We’ve hit times when the filter didn’t remove any PFAS or when a method we thought was working actually wasn’t,” Puer said. “She never takes it personally. She just puts more time in and keeps the project moving forward.”

Remisio emphasized the intersection of engineering, public health and policy.

“When you create a solution, you need to have the right policy in place to actually execute it,” Remisio said.

She emphasized that there are things people can do to help their own health such as move away from nonstick pans. However, PFAS on a large scale won’t be gone anytime soon.

“But the main thing that needs to shift is policy. Large-scale contamination won’t be fixed without systemic change.”

Looking ahead, Remisio said she hopes to continue working in water engineering, specifically addressing PFAS and other

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IT’S EASY TO GET CAUGHT IN THE MONOTONY, BUT I’M DOING THIS TO HOPEFULLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD.

**SOPHIE REMISIO**  
JUNIOR

persistent contaminants.

“PFAS aren’t going anywhere,” Remisio said. “I’m grateful for the experience I’m getting now because I know it will be part

# Senior explores whether expectations amplify benefits of exercise

Exercise science major explores belief influencing outcomes, performance

**Norah Wolf**  
Elon News Network

For Asia Green, a senior exercise science major at Elon, being curious about undergraduate research evolved into something more: a nationally recognized research project exploring the coaction between mindset, movement, and outcomes.

Green traced her initial spark of inspiration and interest in the field of undergraduate research back to her sophomore year, when she first attended the Student Undergraduate Research Forum. The forum exposed Green to student-led research that produced meaningful, real-world impact. From there, she said, she sought out mentorship to get started.

"Seeing a range of health science projects helped me understand how research connects to real-world outcomes," Green said.

Green will present her work this spring at the National Conference of Undergraduate Research from April 13-15 in Richmond, Virginia.

"I stayed motivated by reminding myself of the purpose behind my work," Green states while explaining how she stayed positive and motivated throughout the process.

Her research project is titled "Exercise Expectations: Can the Placebo Effect Boost Exercise's Effects on Mood and Cognition?", and it investigates whether what people believe about exercise can shape how it affects their mood and cognitive performance.

Green said she began by reviewing existing studies on exercise psychology, mood regulation, and cognitive performance to better understand what

researchers had already discovered — a crucial step in understanding what's already given versus what we can further discover.

"It focuses on how a person's expectations about exercise can influence their mood and cognitive performance, beyond the physical benefits," Green said.

This research topic bridges exercise science, psychology and cognitive health into one measurable and ongoing project, according to Green.

Her research questions how mindset can influence exercise and was composed of two groups in an experiment: a control group and an experimental group that tested various aspects of the participants. Green said it took some time to narrow down the official research questioning whether the placebo effect can boost the effect of exercise on mood and cognition.

Asia Green and her mentor, Madison Chandler, first approached the topic through reviewing literature and exploring different ideas.

"I was able to work with Dr. Chandler, and through reviewing literature and exploring different ideas, we identified a gap related to placebo effects in exercise. This led to the development of my current research topic," Green said.

Luckily, Chandler and Green were able to find students studying on campus over the summer willing to participate, but this meant their population was slimmer than usual.

"We started collecting probably at the beginning of the summer because we did some pilot participants," Chandler said. "It was cool for me as her mentor to see it go from this abstract flow chart of what 'will we do?' to like an actual person participant with actual research. She's very gifted."

When Green and her mentor were finally able to successfully recruit participants for the study, an aspect of research that people sometimes overlook, the project began to



COURTESY OF MADISON CHANDLER

Elon senior Asia Green works with a student participant on her research about exercise benefits.

feel "real."

"Probably the hardest part of any study that uses human subjects, I would say, is recruitment," Chandler said.

However, Chandler emphasizes the fact that Green was especially good at gathering interest across campus and urging people to participate.

"She is very good at interacting with people," Chandler said.

Working with human subjects taught both Green and Chandler the realities of this type of research, helping them realize that outcomes are rarely as clear-cut as they first seem.

"You learn lots of skills, and honestly, it teaches you because people will cancel and they won't show up, stuff like that will happen," Chandler said.

Another breakthrough came when Green moved into data analysis and recognized that the study had meaningful results to present after months of reviewing literature and continuing to work with.

The data from the study were meaningful because Green focused on proving how a person's expectations about exercise can influence their mood and cognitive performance, beyond the physical benefits.

"The information that we've uncovered through these lines of research about how good exercise is for the brain is pretty well established," Chandler said. "But don't think it's as well known among the average

population."

Chandler emphasized that, no matter the outcome of the study, their impact on awareness about the cognitive benefits of exercise can still be very meaningful.

"Even if it doesn't improve their performance or anything. Even just spreading awareness of the fact that it's something that we sort of take for granted. Sometimes, people actually don't know as much as we think they do," Chandler said.

Chandler, an associate professor for exercise science, said she continues to learn new things through undergraduate research, even though she has participated as a mentor many times before throughout Green's project. Chandler said she wants to spread awareness about the benefits of exercise and said that through her and Green's work, they were able to do just that.

"Maybe people aren't as familiar as we think that they are about how exercise can be used as a tool to improve your mood and improve your cognitive function, reaction time, and focus," Chandler said.

Green's story started early when she attended SURE, but for many, the world of undergraduate research can be intimidating and hard to get started in.

"Put yourself out there and do not be afraid to ask questions. Find a mentor who supports you and shares your interests. Be open to learning," Green said. "Starting is the most important step, even if you do not feel fully prepared."

## FIGHTING STEREOTYPES

### Junior expands opportunities in stage combat

Acting student works to make space more inclusive for female performers

**Charlotte Pfabe**  
Elon News Network

Elon junior Aubrey Kocsis wants to fight the patriarchy, literally.

"My project is looking at the movement and also gender theory to find what does it mean to incorporate a feminist perspective into stage combat, and hopefully combat 2,500 years of sexism in the performing arts, literally and metaphorically," Kocsis said.

A Lumen Scholar winner, Kocsis first became familiar with stage combat when she travelled to Oxford, England in high school to attend a Shakespeare Summer Intensive. She learned so much about what she calls the "illusion of violence," but also left the program feeling discouraged.

"I felt like an action hero. I felt so cool," Kocsis said. "And then, as we were working on our scenes, every offer I put out got rejected, that they didn't want to hear my voice in the room, and that was really disheartening, and made me think that stage combat wasn't a good fit."

Kocsis grew up dancing. A member of Elon's cheer team, she always knew she wanted to be a performer, and when she came to Elon as an acting major, she found herself performing stage combat for Elon Performing Arts department's production of "As You Like It." She said the director, Kevin Otis, created the role of Charlene, a wrestling



ENN FILE PHOTO  
Aubrey Kocsis as Charleen during a dress rehearsal for "As You Like It" on April 10, 2024 in McCrary Theatre.

sister, specifically for her.

"It was really exciting to get this part that was made for me. And then Jeff A.R. Jones, the fight director, he worked to incorporate some dance and acrobatics to elevate the fight and really leverage my strengths there," Kocsis said.

Elon professor of performing arts Jeff A. R. Jones served as the fight director for "As You Like It." He said working with Kocsis was exciting because her acrobatic skills allowed her to bring the choreography to life.

"We had a great time working on that show because she brought so much movement vocabulary in that dance gymnastic space," Jones said.

Jones said his process as a fight director is collaborative, and he tries to first consider

the skills actors initially bring to the table.

"Anywhere I can lean into what the performer is strong in is going to be better than if I come in and try to train them in something that's new," Jones said.

Kocsis said she started to think back on her first interaction with stage combat and realized that there was a way for her to dive deeper into the frustration she felt being a woman in a typically male-dominated space.

"Reflecting on my two incredibly different experiences, I thought, I never want another performer to feel like she didn't belong in stage combat," Kocsis said.

She started the planning process last spring when she was the fight captain for Elon Performing Arts department's production of "Grapes of Wrath." It was then that she started recording her own fight scenes to use for research.

Then, she studied abroad in London in fall 2025. She became certified in hand-to-hand combat and rapier fighting, which is similar to fencing but with a long-bladed, single-handed sword.

Kocsis said her research process is tedious. She is using her own abilities for research and is learning stage combat techniques as a part of the analysis. The learning process already took a while, she said, but what takes even longer is combing through the recordings.

She closely studies her videos, often hitting the pause button less than every second.

"I could take a piece that is a minute long and it would be like 60 or so different movements," Kocsis said.

She is combining Leban movement

analysis with gender theory to study the differences between masculine and feminine portrayals of aggression and violence. Leban movement analysis examines the qualities and intentions of movements to identify patterns, which tell a story within a specific piece or a style of movement, according to Kocsis.

Her final presentation of research will include the documentation of her process in a typical essay form, but also a stage combat demonstration. Kocsis said she is still workshopping how the demonstration will look, but plans to hold auditions for performers in the fall.

"One of the things I learned from watching theater in London is that you can't fight the patriarchy without the patriarchy existing," Kocsis said. "So I think that there probably will also be male-identifying performers in there, but this is still part of the discovery and the process this semester."

Even though she's been immersed in stage combat for almost an entire year now, Kocsis said she is still very interested in the performance style and is excited to continue with her research throughout her senior year.

"What I love about stage combat is it's magic. It's trying to get the audience to see something that didn't happen. So you're creating an illusion," Kocsis said. "So not only are you acting with this precision, because every movement you do has to be precise, but you also have to put chaos over it, so you have the juxtaposition of precision and chaos to create magic. And I think that's really fun, that it's another form of magic."

# Physics major explores connection between quantum, classical physics

Project explains quantum physics in more intuitive terms

**Miles Hayford**  
Elon News Network

Junior Muhammad Awal Tahiru has always been fascinated by time.

"I've been thinking about it for God knows how long," Tahiru said. "What is this thing? What is time? Why is it so elusive? Why do people think it's an illusion?"

Tahiru's project for this year's Student Undergraduate Research Forum is focusing on how small-scale things move and how to bridge together quantum physics and classical physics.

Classical physics deals with the predictable behavior of human-scale objects; whereas, quantum physics deals with probabilities of the smaller, atomic world of particles. These two types don't always fit together, according to chair of the department of physics and astronomy Martin Kamela, who served as Tahiru's research mentor.

"It's bizarre that, at small-scale, the rules that we are used to from classical mechanics don't exactly work," Kamela said. "So Muhammad's project was basically to try to model how an object would move if it got a little bit more energy."

Tahiru's SURF project tried to help explain quantum physics in more digestible terms.

"A lot of these things that are happening in the quantum world, like maybe tunneling or superpositions and all those things, they don't have classical outlooks," Tahiru said. "It's not something that's intuitive because it doesn't happen in our everyday world. So what, essentially, what we are doing is we're

trying to take something that is not intuitive and make it intuitive using the language of the world we live and understand."

Tahiru said bridging the gap between these two concepts will help explain what time is and why it moves in one direction.

Tahiru used a mathematical tool called the Wigner Function to help visualize what happens to position and velocity in time as an object gets more energy, according to Kamela. Kamela and Tahiru worked together on the project by reading papers and then running numerical simulations.

Kamela said Tahiru was a quick study.

"We would think about what to do, and he would actually go back and figure out how to do it," Kamela said. "He is resourceful in that he was able to find

answers to many questions."

Tahiru is also a Lumen Scholar, so he said this project was just the beginning and he continues to work on it. He said it was a "stepping stone" project and now he is focusing on how the environment around a particle affects it. He said once he understands the environment aspect, he can move to the question of why time seems to move forward in only one direction.

Tahiru's favorite part of the project is getting the chance to explain concepts such as quantum physics, he said.

"You're taking something that's very abstract, something that's very hard to

explain, and then now you're saying, 'What if we can make this very easy to explain, not just to ourselves, but to everybody around us,'" Tahiru said. "The whole idea is you're taking this beautiful hidden world and then you're bringing it to light. For me, I think that's really the most beautiful and fun part of it."

Tahiru is currently studying abroad so he will not give a presentation at SURF Day, but will give one next year. Kamela said it is important for students like Tahiru to take on SURF projects and be forced to visualize and explain their research in terms where others can understand.

"Folks underestimate the importance of communicating with the public, with folks who are not working actively on science," Kamela said. "It's part of the job description to be able to translate the ideas into everyday language so that folks can understand what we're trying to do."

What drives Tahiru to keep working on quantum physics and to continue looking for more answers is his curiosity, he said.

"Nature has a lot to offer. There's a lot of things you're not able to see," Tahiru said. "Thank God people came up with mathematics. We can see a lot of things that are not obvious through the lens of mathematics. The whole point is, 'OK, how much more can we see? How far can we really probe this thing? And that's really what is interesting for me.'"

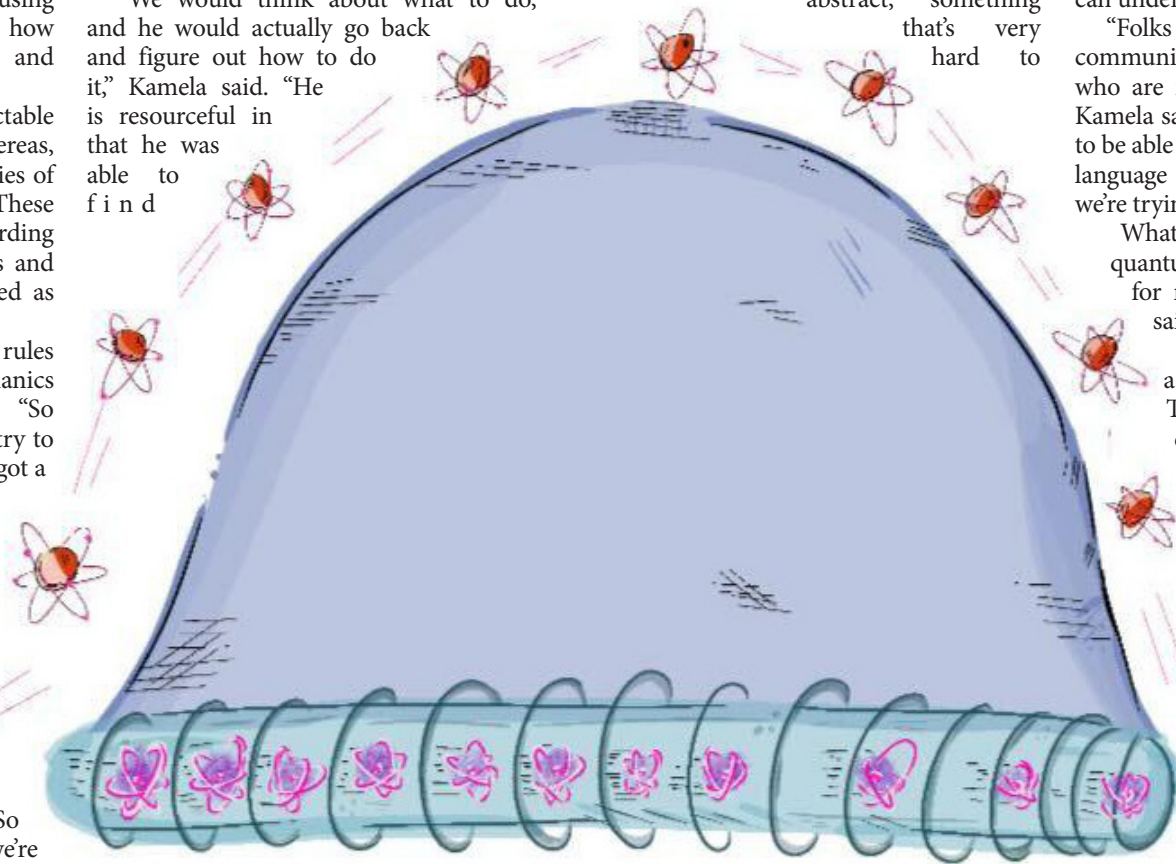


ILLUSTRATION BY ALICE MORRISSEY  
Classical physics atoms move over obstacles, contrasting quantum physics atoms, which "tunnel through" them.

## Student researcher discovers suspected cause of plant disease

Senior spent time at Elon identifying fungus that infects blue curls plant

**Trista Panagakos**  
Elon News Network

During his freshman year, now-senior Billy Impagliazzo took two classes taught by biology professor Antonio Izzo. When he got to Elon, Impagliazzo said he knew he wanted to take part in research projects. In his sophomore year, Impagliazzo went to Izzo to discuss research opportunities he had in his lab.

Izzo said he believed Impagliazzo would conduct research for only a semester, but almost three years later, Impagliazzo has identified the main microbe infecting the blue curls plant and has presented his

research on SURF Day previously.

"Just do a small project and see what happens," Izzo said. "It kind of turned into a 2.5 year project because once you get through one, there's the next new question."

Impagliazzo said the blue curls plant is usually planted in a garden because of its aesthetics but also serves as a source of nectar for pollinators and as a medicinal herb in East Asia.

If the fungal disease were to be left untreated, Impagliazzo said those who grow the blue curls plant will be impacted.

As many research projects begin, Impagliazzo's started with an observation. The blue curls plant is commonly a garden and decorative plant and was observed dying outside of one of Izzo's colleague's gardens. He said his colleague had never seen the fungal growth before and brought

it to Izzo.

The research initially revolved around trying to understand what fungus was causing the disease in the blue curls plant. Then, isolate and identify the fungus from the diseased plant. To do this, Impagliazzo had to separate the microbes on the infected plant and put them into culture — which isolates each fungus and allows it to grow — before infecting healthy plants with the individual fungi.

"We basically just did a bunch of science stuff, like DNA isolations and gel electrophoresis, all these fun microbiology processes just to extract all these different kind of fungi that were residing on the plant, and basically using these postulates to figure out which of these fungal diseases is actually causing infection on the plant," Impagliazzo said.

Impagliazzo said he goes to the lab once a week for a few hours to conduct different experiments. Impagliazzo described a typical day in the lab as doing a PCR application amplification. This creates thousands of DNA samples, which he will take to run a gel electrophoresis to compare the different bands of DNA. Then he will run the DNA across the gel to distinguish if the species of fungus matches with other fungi he has been working with.

"Once that's done, I'll annotate the gel, see if it matches up with our previous results and everything else we've been working with," Impagliazzo said. "Then, if yes, on to the next step. And if not, we'll have to run it back again the next day or the next week."

Impagliazzo said when he first started to work in the lab, Izzo was there to help guide him and get used to the equipment and procedures in the lab. Since he only goes into the lab once a week, Impagliazzo said it took until this year for him to feel fully acclimated.

"Once you get the hang of it, that is

when you start spreading your wings," Impagliazzo said. "You just come in by yourself for a few hours and it's kind of nice, cause you get the whole lab to yourself and it makes you feel like a little mad scientist."

This past summer, Impagliazzo took part in the Summer Undergraduate Research Experience, an eight week research program on-campus which allowed him to work more intensively on his research.

"That was when we were infecting the plants and we were waiting for them to actually develop those disease symptoms," Impagliazzo said.

This allowed him to gather data and classify the infection and causes of the agent.

Impagliazzo originally expected the disease to stem from *diaporthe goulterii*. Through his research, Impagliazzo has identified the main pathogenic fungus infecting the blue curls plant, *dionophorseta acuta*.

"It's definitely a newer subspecies of the fungus that is affecting these plants, and it's not very typical for this plant species interaction," Impagliazzo said.

Impagliazzo has presented his research during the last two SURF Days, and this year his presentation will be the culmination of the entire research process he has taken on since his sophomore year.

"This upcoming SURF spring is going to be the whole story," Impagliazzo said. "Why it started, how it started, the steps from my sophomore year, junior year and the findings that we eventually came to the conclusion on during these last couple semesters."

Izzo said he believes the research project will have reached its endpoint after Impagliazzo graduates in May.

"It's one that has wrapped up nicely within the timing of his time here," Izzo said. "I think that maybe was part of what inspired him to want to keep rolling with it."



TRISTA PANAGAKOS | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Billy Impagliazzo demonstrates a procedure April 10 in a biology lab in McMichael Science Center.

# Belk Library to add neuroinclusive spaces guided by student research

Research drives creation of inclusive study environments

**Lily Mosbacher**  
Elon News Network

Over the summer of 2026, Elon's Carol Grotnes Belk Library will create two new neuroinclusive spaces to better support diverse learning needs, building on the success of two classrooms in Lindner Hall that have been in use throughout the school year.

These spaces are a result of research conducted by three students: senior Kira Campagna, junior Benjamin Krasnow and junior Kaz Kelly. The group is studying what makes a classroom accessible and effective for all learners.

For Campagna, an elementary education major, the project stood out because it made a real-world impact.

"We all really gravitated towards this research project, particularly because we saw how it could be implemented and actually put into effect at Elon and on Elon's campus," Campagna said.

The research originated through the Center for Engaged Learning, where students and faculty collaborate on long-term research seminars. According to Jessie L. Moore, the director of the center, student research and evaluation play a key role in shaping the work.

"The student members are always really good at making sure that the student experience is centered in the research," Moore said.

The research focused on designing spaces that support neurodivergent students, those whose learning and processing styles differ from traditional expectations. However, both students and faculty members involved with the research emphasized that these changes benefit all learners.

Krasnow, a human service studies major, equates the effect of their research to the analogy of "a rising tide lifts all boats."

"When we help support a marginalized group of people, it helps everybody else as well," Krasnow said.

The project began with redesigning two classrooms on the second floor of Lindner Hall, incorporating flexible seating, calming colors and movable furniture.

The researchers gathered student feedback following the creation of these spaces by conducting surveys and making observations about what strategies worked best. The results are guiding the next phase of their project, which will include two new neuroinclusive spaces in Belk Library.

When completed, the library spaces will include adjustable lighting, varied seating arrangements and clearly defined zones, allowing students to understand areas that are meant for silent studying or group work.

Campagna said features such as large windows that provide natural light, paired with the ability to control brightness, were especially important, according to the study's findings.

"Fully fluorescent lights can give people headaches and frustrate people very easily, deterring them from working in the library," Campagna said.

“

WHEN WE HELP SUPPORT A MARGINALIZED GROUP OF PEOPLE, IT HELPS EVERYBODY ELSE AS WELL.

**BENJAMIN KRASNOW**  
JUNIOR

Beyond physical comfort, the design considers psychological factors. Moore said students should be able to quickly understand the intended use of a space.

"Is this a space where I'm supposed to be quiet? Is this a space where I can fidget a little bit more?" Moore said. "Those cues really matter."

Near the classrooms that have been tested



LILY MOSBACHER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Senior Kira Campagna describes how an area on the third floor of Carol Grotnes Belk Library will be modified to be intentionally neuroinclusive.

on the second floor of Lindner, there are clearly laid out signs allowing students to have an understanding of what each space is meant for and where certain actions are appropriate.

The project was highly collaborative and involved faculty, students, campus staff and external partners. Through workshops and focus groups, the team gathered input from both neurodivergent and neurotypical students to ensure the spaces feel inclusive for all students.

While Campagna will graduate before the project is fully completed, she is excited for the success of her teammates as they see the project through to completion.

"I was a little sad that I wouldn't see the

full end of it, but I'm glad to be a part of it," Campagna said.

Looking ahead, Krasnow said he hopes to study how students use the new spaces and expand their findings beyond Elon. Krasnow said there is limited research on neuroinclusive design in higher education, making their work particularly significant.

"Hopefully, if everything goes well and our research continues, other universities, other schools, other areas that have common spaces and classrooms can take what we've learned," Krasnow said.

All three student researchers will share their findings as the keynote presenters at the 2026 Conference on Engaged Learning this summer.

## Classroom in Lindner designed to be neuroinclusive based on undergraduate research

Mobile seating options with adjustable height, movable furniture that encourages personal space and ensures a flexible room layout, windows, and adjustable lighting are some of the elements that allow this classroom to meet different needs and preferences of students, according to a poster in Lindner Hall explaining the building's neuroinclusive spaces.



Natural light with adjustable blinds

Long tables to promote personal space

Moveable furniture for flexible room layout

Adjustable seating options

Lindner Hall classroom 204 is one of two classrooms designed to be neuroinclusive based on findings from student research.

LILY MOSBACHER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



MEGAN WALSH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

New York Times bestselling author and journalist Frank Bruni discusses his book "The Age of Grievance" on political polarization and outrage as part of the Elon University Speaker Series on April 9 in Whitley Auditorium. Drawing from his experience as a professor at Duke University, Bruni said how students often feel pressure to respond to major events online, even when they lack the full details. He said these habits are not intentional, but rather a result of how platforms are designed. Social media algorithms can reinforce beliefs and limit exposure to different perspectives. "You feel like if you don't say something, people think you don't care," Bruni said.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER  
Elon University juniors Simone Bergeron and Mariana Reding during their doubles match against Coastal Carolina University's Aida Mitrache and Brooke Rogers. Bergeron and Reding won their match 6-1. Learn more about Elon women's tennis on page 12.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Stanford University junior defender Kaleigh Sommers attempts to block Elon University redshirt junior attacker Anna Hackett from scoring during their match April 12. Elon lost the game 19-6, ending the team's three-game winning streak.



EMMA LUCKMAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon University senior and Elonthon Vice President of Operations Andrea Perez performs a dance routine with fellow executive board members on stage during Elonthon 2026 in Alumni Gym on April 11. The six-hour dance marathon, one of Elon's many philanthropic events, brought students together to raise over \$47,000 for Duke Children's Hospital and the Children's Miracle Network, a nonprofit organization that raises funds for children's hospitals in the United States and Canada.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon University sophomore midfielder/outfielder Lani Wyrick runs to first base April 11 during their game against Hampton University. Elon lost the game 6-2 but won both the April 10 and 12 games against Hampton 8-0.

# Elon parent, trustee to deliver 2026 commencement address

Speaker's career path spans investments, passion projects



MEGAN WALSH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Wall Street strategist and author Patricia Walsh Chadwick P'16 will speak as the 2026 undergraduate commencement speaker. She sat down with Elon News Network April 10 in Moseley Center to discuss her journey and connections to Elon.

**Abigail Hines**  
Elon News Network

Patricia Walsh Chadwick has held many roles at Elon University, from being an Elon parent in 2012 to more recently joining the finance and administration committees as a trustee. This spring, she will take on a new role as the 2026 undergraduate commencement speaker.

Chadwick was offered the position of commencement speaker over a phone call from Jim Piatt, senior vice president for advancement and external affairs. Chadwick said she knew her late husband, John, would have encouraged her to say yes.

"I said to Jim, I said, 'My instinct as I'm driving the car is to think, oh, I have to tell John. And of course, I can't, but I will promise you, he would have been so happy for me,'" Chadwick said. "And so I said, 'I'm not going to take any time to think about it. I'm gonna do it.'"

Chadwick first came to know the university when her son was touring colleges in 2011. Both her and her son were impressed by the campus and the growth they saw in the works, she said.

Chadwick said she has not yet written her speech but knows her conversations with current students will help her shape the message she gives to them in May.



I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE  
ENDGAME IS, BUT AT THIS  
POINT, I STILL HAVE A LOT OF  
ENERGY, AND I LOVE COMING  
DOWN HERE

**PATRICIA WALSH CHADWICK**  
2026 UNDERGRADUATE COMMENCEMENT  
SPEAKER

"I am honored beyond belief," Chadwick said. "I will pay close attention to what the senior members want, are interested in as a message to their graduates, and I will do my best to implement something that will give people hope and encouragement and

help them realize that they can make their way in the world."

Chadwick's career path is marked by several distinct transitions from one phase of life to another. She grew up in a religious cult in Massachusetts and was kicked out as she was about to graduate high school.

From there, she began working and taking night classes, studying economics at Boston University. After moving to New York City in the '70s, her 30-year career in investment began.

Little by little, she worked her way up to eventually become a global partner for Invesco, an asset managing firm. By the early 2000s, she had decided to leave Wall Street and pursue a career that better fit her new lifestyle as a mom of twins.

Her desire to find intellectually stimulating work led her to join the boards of insurance and mutual fund companies. Ten years ago, she started Anchor Health Initiative Corporation in Connecticut, a healthcare company for LGBTQ youth. While she was unfamiliar with how healthcare companies run, she knew her experience in business could be of help.

"We went from being a tiny hole-in-the-wall endeavor to having 5000 patients, 50 employees and being the largest LGBTQ healthcare facility in Connecticut," Chadwick said. "It was a project that needed to be undertaken, and what I did have was business experience, and so I brought that to it."

As a parent, Chadwick said she was impressed by Elon's efforts to grow the university. Chadwick witnessed this growth firsthand when she joined the Martha and Spencer Love School of Business advisory board and eventually became the chair for several years. She said she enjoys seeing the advancements to the university and the challenge of working for the finance committee.

"Management and business and finance and all of those things are top of mind to me all the time," Chadwick said. "To be able to kind of engage in that endeavor on behalf of the university is wonderful. So I don't know what the endgame is, but at this point, I still have a lot of energy, and I love coming down here."

Chadwick will speak at both Elon undergraduate commencement ceremonies May 22 at Schar Center.

## Burlington Police sees increase in productivity through AI use

Department experiments with AI for report writing

**Charlotte Pfabe**  
Elon News Network

The Burlington Police Department may implement artificial intelligence to help officers write case reports.

The department is using a program called Truleo, which BPD Intel Sgt. Misha Braja said the department has already used for almost two years to analyze body-worn camera footage.

"Report writing is the bread and butter of law enforcement," Braja said. "We have to document everything that we do."

Braja said the department is still in the trial-stages of report writing with Truleo and the results are being evaluated. He said the human touch of a report is essential to its validity, especially since police reports typically include officer observations.

"It's not just pulling from an AI program and the officers copy and pasting and sending that off to court, because ultimately, that report has to stand on its own," Braja said. "They have to get up on the stand and say, 'These are the observations that I made.'"

The department was the first in the

state to roll out AI use for analyzing body-worn camera footage. The program connects with Panasonic, the system the department uses for its footage. Then, it takes in the video, transcribes the audio and flags moments that need to be reviewed, according to Braja.

Every three months, the department is required to put together quarterly body-worn camera analysis reports. Supervisors, such as Braja, are responsible for creating these reports, but also for giving feedback and coaching officers based on the footage.

"Honestly, it was a time consuming task, because you would have to stop what you were doing, come out of the field, get onto the program, find the right videos that actually had some substance to them," Braja said.

According to BPD Public Information Officer Stephanía Garzón, there are around 1,000 hours of body-worn camera footage that need to be reviewed by the department each year. Truleo, she said, is reducing the amount of time officers stay behind their desks and helping the department stay up to date with new tools.

"The ultimate goal with this technology is to enhance the police service that we provide to our community, and by leveraging technology similar to how the private sector is doing it, so that we stay at

the same level," Garzón said.

Braja said that like any AI transcription, the program isn't perfect. Sometimes ambient sound or slang interferes with the clarity of the audio files. This is why the department requires human-verification of everything AI touches. He said Truleo includes a "human-verified" checkbox so the department can monitor what has been reviewed.

Truleo is Criminal Justice Information Services compliant, which means it follows the FBI's strict security standards for handling, storing and transmitting criminal justice information. Garzón said the program does not capture demographic data.

The program can also transcribe in languages other than English, according to Braja, however it is not able to translate the audio.

While in his previous role in BPD's investigations unit, Braja also tried Truleo's case analyst feature, to help with what he said was a time-intensive case.

"It simply puts what you put into it. It analyzes it very chronologically, organizes it really well, as if I had spent two weeks making flow charts and outlines and things like that," Braja said.

Braja said police officers often only get 10 hours to complete all their tasks for the day. He said this technology is helping get



SARAH T. MOORE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Burlington Police Department is in trial stages to begin using AI program, Truleo, to write case reports. The department already uses the program to analyze body-worn camera footage.

officers where they are most needed. "A lot of officers, you know, they do it well, but they didn't sign up to be report writers," Braja said. "They want to be out there. They want to be engaging with the community. They want to get the bad guys."

# NC state legislature yet to set state budget

Current state budget has not been updated since 2023

**Trista Panagakos**  
Elon News Network

North Carolina is still the only state without a budget. The current state funding is using budget numbers from 2023, the last time a budget was passed. The state passes a biennial budget which appropriates funds for two years.

Gov. Josh Stein proposed a \$1.4 billion budget in March which would emphasize funding to Medicaid, investing in teachers and maintaining services. Communications Director for the NC Office of State Budget and Management Marcia Evans said this was a critical needs budget request, which is not the standard funding request.

"It's really just for this current fiscal year, that we're three-quarters of the way through," Evans said. "There are things that we really need to fund and we don't want to wait until next fiscal year to address."

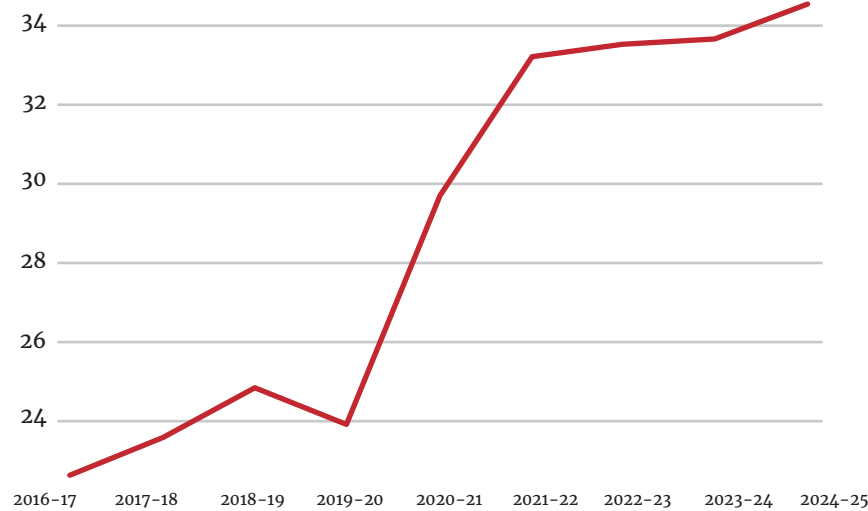
Senior Public Policy Analyst at the NC Budget and Tax Center Sally Hodges-Copple said school districts and getting access to healthcare are affected by the lack of a budget. State government employees have not received a change in pay in multiple years as well.

"It creates enormous uncertainty for state agencies and local governments, local leaders who are trying to plan and deliver well-being in their communities and are unable to do so because they do not have clarity about funding from the state level," Hodges-Copple said.

The budget fight stems from disagreements between lawmakers in the state House and Senate over income tax cuts. North Carolina

## General fund revenue in billions

The North Carolina general fund revenue since 2016-17.



Data from North Carolina Fiscal Research Division.

DATA VISUALIZATION BY TRISTA PANAGAKOS

has cut income taxes for individuals and businesses since 2013. As part of that policy, Hodges-Copple explained future taxes would automatically be cut regardless of the state's current revenue or ability to provide the current levels of services. Hodges-Copple said if the legislature is not willing to stop the tax cuts, they may have to resort to spending cuts.

"The House is increasingly concerned that those automatic cuts are putting the state in an unsustainable financial position, whereas the Senate remains committed to those autopilot tax cuts," Hodges-Copple said.

The Dec. 9 State Budget Update compiled by the OSBM stated that revenue growth has plateaued and there would be negative growth in the 2026-27 fiscal year. The update also states that in fiscal year 2027-28 the "state

revenues for the year will not be sufficient to sustain even the current budget with zero growth."

The state budget provides funding over the course of two years. The OSBM and the North Carolina General Assembly's fiscal research division creates a revenue forecast for what they expect the revenues will be for the biennium. The governor will then put together a proposed budget and present it to the general assembly. Lawmakers will create their own budget and pass it back and forth between the House and Senate until they can agree on an appropriations act.

Once the general assembly approves a budget, the governor can sign it into law. The biennium starts July 1 of an odd number year. In the second year of the biennium

OSBM updates their revenue forecast and the governor will again introduce adjustments to the budget.

For the last four biennium, the legislature has not passed an appropriations act by the July 1 deadline. Evans said while there may not have been an act passed by July 1, budgets have been passed after the deadline.

"There have been many instances in the last eight years, when the legislature could not come to an agreement by the time the new fiscal biennium started," Evans said.

The state legislature has passed a base budget which is the amount of money it takes to continue operations at the same level at the end of the last biennium.

The legislature has also passed three miniature budgets, which funds fewer services than an appropriations act. These budgets have provided funding for Medicaid, infrastructure projects and Hurricane Helene repairs.

"They have passed some bills that had impact on agency budgets, very targeted, very specific things," Evans said. "They funded additional positions at the DMV, special projects, just a handful of things; nothing like you would see in a full appropriations act."

Evans said the state can continue to operate without a budget because of a continuing resolution authority, which the legislature passed. State government agencies are operating their budgets on the previous allotted budget from 2023.

Members of both the House and Senate have acknowledged the need for a budget in the upcoming legislative session. In a press release, Senate Democratic Leader Sydney Batch called for bipartisan collaboration within the Senate and the House to finally pass a budget. House speaker Destin Hall has also made public comments saying getting a budget passed was a top priority for the House when it went back into session.

# NC Republican senators contend for top job after senate leader's primary loss

Sen. Phil Berger has served as Senate leader for 15 years but lost his primary race

**Miles Hayford**  
Elon News Network

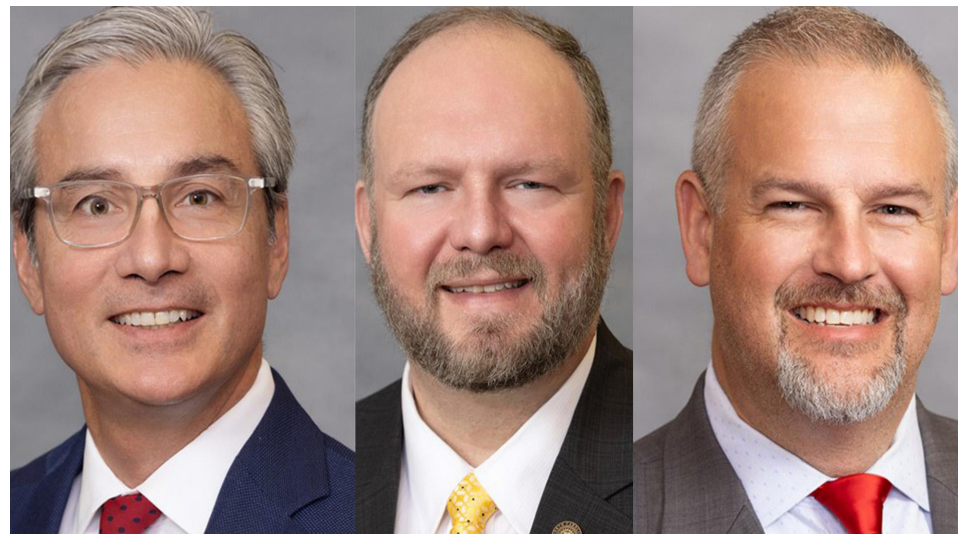
With North Carolina Senate leader Phil Berger conceding his primary against Rockingham County Sheriff Sam Page, the political structure of North Carolina has been flipped on its head and several Republican senators are putting their names up for consideration to be the next Senate leader.

The Senate leader is often seen as the most powerful position in North Carolina state government and Berger has exerted great influence over his 26 years in the senate and his 15 years as the leader of the Republican senate caucus. Berger's predecessor as Senate leader was Democrat Marc Basnight, who represented counties in eastern North Carolina and held the top job for a record 18 years.

Senior political analyst for the John Locke Foundation Mitch Kokai said the job lends itself to those long periods of time because of how powerful the position has become. But Kokai said he thinks senators will want to distribute power more openly in the future, so it is unlikely the next Senate leader would serve as long as Berger or Basnight.

One thing Republicans will be looking for in a new Senate leader is fundraising ability, according to Eric Heberlig, a political science professor at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. Berger's fundraising network was strong and he was skillful at raising money for other Republican candidates. Heberlig said just being an effective legislator won't be enough in the evaluation process.

"Who has that capacity to shake the money tree in the same way that Berger did to produce those campaign funds?" Heberlig



From left to right, Sen. Michael Lee, Sen. Ralph Hise, and Sen. Todd Johnson.

said. "Because if you're a Republican senator, and you think, 'Well, what happens if I do have a competitive race, including in a primary. Am I going to have to raise all that money on my own?' You're going to feel a whole lot better if you think, 'Well, the majority leader is good at this. They'll have ample funds to help me protect my back if it's needed.'"

There are a few frontrunners who have emerged as those who would be willing to take on the role of Senate leader.

Sen. Michael Lee of New Hanover County is one of the top candidates who has expressed interest in the role. Lee currently serves as the Republican majority leader, and is a close Berger ally. But Kokai said he might not be the first choice because he was a replacement for former majority leader Paul Newton that left in the middle of the session for a university job, and because his district is purple and prone to flipping to Democrat.

Sen. Ralph Hise, another one of Berger's allies and the current deputy president pro tempore, has also said he intends to seek the

position. He is the second highest ranking senator and is a top budget writer, meaning he is very involved in negotiating and drafting the state's spending plans. Kokai said he has been one of Berger's top lieutenants when it comes to election issues.

Sen. Todd Johnson, a majority whip, has only been in the Senate for seven years but plans to seek the job, too. Johnson is not one of Berger's top allies, so Kokai said he could shake things up.

Kokai said that even if the next Senate leader were to be one of Berger's closest allies, they would likely bring new ideas to the table.

"Even if they were inclined to go along with many of the same policy ideas and even the way that the Senate is structured, if they would go along with the way that Berger has run things, they would be a little bit different, just because it's a new person and it's a new personality in that job," Kokai said.

Heberlig said that a new Senate leader gives the Republicans an opportunity to act more independently and bring in different

ideas than Berger's.

"If you do have a variety of candidates offering alternatives, that really almost forces them to think through what the merits of those different approaches to leadership would be," Heberlig said.

But Heberlig said Berger's influence won't completely go away. Berger will still have supporters in Raleigh and his lobbying networks will remain, according to Heberling. Much of it will depend on how Berger decides to approach the rest of his career.

"Part of the dynamic will be how much he stays on as a party leader behind the scenes," Heberlig said. "The other element of that is how much the new senate majority leader tries to strike out their own path, whether they intentionally or purposely try to stake out a different route than Berger or whether they're comfortable with continuing on the status quo."

Unifying the GOP and replicating Berger's ability to keep his caucus cohesive will also be important, Heberlig said.

Other potential candidates that have not expressed interest publicly include Sen. Brent Jackson, one of the longest serving members of the Senate and Sen. Amy Galey of Alamance County. Galey is one of Berger's top allies and tried to convince Page to drop out of the race against Berger. She is the only woman in Senate Republican leadership.

Galey declined to comment on her potential candidacy, but told Elon News Network that she is focused on constituent work and preparing for the upcoming session.

Kokai said the GOP may come up with a succession plan in the next few months, but could see it waiting until after midterm elections in November.

"The key thing for the Republicans is to rally around a particular person and not have a fight that would stretch into the next legislative session and cause them trouble in terms of getting anything done," Kokai said.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

An Elon University student takes part in Elon University's annual Holi celebration event of color throwing, which is held in celebration of a Hindu festival that marks the arrival of spring. At Elon that celebration came alive April 10 through bursts of color, music and kites filling the Phi Beta Kappa Commons throughout the afternoon.



KATRINA HOLTZ | PHOTO EDITOR

Students get covered in colored chalk April 10 during Elon's Holi celebration at Phi Beta Kappa Commons.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A participant throws colored chalk into the crowd during the Holi celebration April 10.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The colored chalk used in the Holi celebration draws large crowds of students each year. Director of multifaith programming and engagement at the Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life Hillary Zaken said while the celebration welcome all students, it specifically celebrates the campus's Hindu community. "I want students to listen to the experiences of their Hindu peers and their Hindu professors and their Hindu staff members, about what the holiday means to them," Zaken said.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A student takes part in Elon's Holi celebration. The April 10 event also included dancing, crafts, kite flying and food.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life helps facilitate Elon's annual Holi celebration. "As a South Asian student, there's not a lot of us here, but it always, since my freshman year, has meant the world to me that this is one of the biggest Elon events," Senior Truitt Center multifaith intern Ahron Frankel said.



KATRINA HOLTZ | PHOTO EDITOR

Freshman Ella Chamness makes snow angel in chalk April 10 during the Holi celebration at the Phi Beta Kappa Commons.

# Women's tennis team builds championship culture on energy, trust



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon University juniors Simone Bergeron and Mariana Reding after their doubles match against Coastal Carolina University's Aida Mitrache and Brooke Rogers. Bergeron and Reding won the match, 6 to 1.

## Culture of laughter turns mistakes into momentum for Phoenix

**Kathan Gandhi**  
Elon News Network

As junior Mariana Reding was preparing for her serve, she first checked in with fellow junior and longtime doubles partner Simone Bergeron.

"Here," Bergeron asked. "And here?"

Reding nodded, affirming Bergeron's suggestion. The small gesture was enough. Bergeron called for a kick serve out wide.

The plan worked. Reding served outside, moving her opponent off the court. Bergeron pounced on the shallow angle the team got in response, forcing their opponents to hit a weak return.

Reding had an easy volley to finish off the point. She missed it.

But walking back — it'd be hard to tell. Instead of screaming or crying, Reding laughed.

That laughter, it turns out, is not incidental. It's foundational.

Now 14-4, as of April 14, and heading into the postseason as defending Coastal Athletic Association champions, head coach Elizabeth Anderson said Elon's success goes far beyond wins and losses. To her, it's about togetherness.

"We play as a really good unit as a team," Anderson said, emphasizing the importance of playing with a collective energy. "We just do a great job of using the momentum in these important matches."

As a coach, Anderson said she knows the importance of players feeding off one another's energy. She encourages her team to practice "being loud" during warm-up routines before matches.

Fans see that practice pay off on gameday. When senior Madison Cordisco is on a roll, the entire complex knows it. Not just because of her play, but the emotion that follows.

"Let's go" was a common scream heard from Court 6 on Elon's senior day, April 11, as Cordisco played her final match at the Jimmy Powell Tennis Center. The high-pitched, instantly recognizable noise is almost like an anthem for the Phoenix.

Cordisco's teammates quickly fired back, yelling, "Let's go, Mads" while simultaneously

focusing on matches of their own. When prompted about Cordisco's impact, Anderson almost seemed like a proud parent.

"She has been extremely dedicated to our team over the past four years," Anderson said. "I'm really proud of what she's accomplished here, and you can see her impact on the team."

Even when points slip away, the response doesn't. Energy, in fact, is treated almost like a tactic. The team makes it a mission to sprint to the court after the opening coin toss.

"If you see us, and we're not energetic, something's off," Reding said, laughing. "We cannot even play at that point. Energy is everything."

After two seasons together, Reding and Bergeron's chemistry borders on automatic. Bergeron describes it as a "fluid" rhythm where each player anticipates the other's next move. Reding said at this point, it's second nature.

"It's just super normal to me," Reding said. "I feel like we can really chill. Her mind, she knows what I'm doing, and I know what she's doing."

That familiarity generates freedom that's rare in competitive tennis. Instead of tightening up, they swing freely. Missed shots aren't met with frustration, but encouragement. Sometimes even laughter.

"If we're making the right moves and doing the right things and it doesn't go our way, that's a good choice anyway," Bergeron added. "It's going to pay off in the end."

It's the same message Anderson has emphasized all season. Mistakes happen, but they're part of the rhythm, and it's the response that matters.

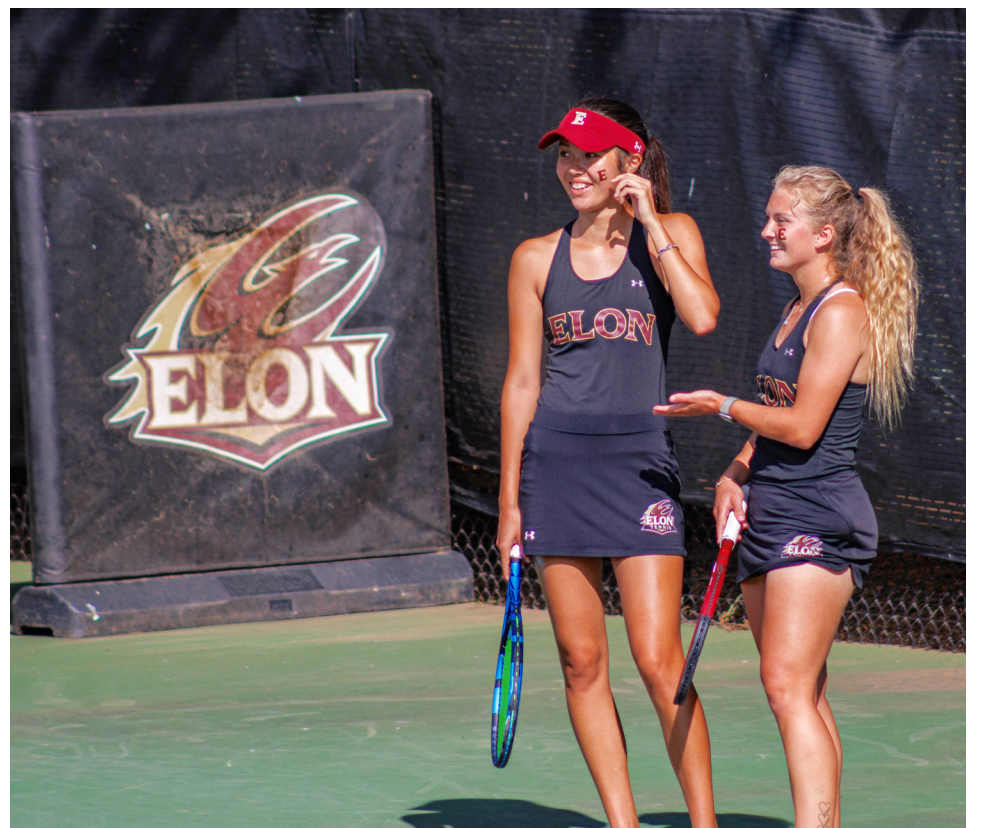
The result is a culture where positivity isn't forced. It's practiced. Bergeron called it part of the team's "brand," which is felt by both the Phoenix and their opponents.

As Elon heads into the CAA tournament, Coach Anderson shared a similar message with her team.

"Just keep remembering to enjoy playing together," Anderson said in the post-match huddle. "We've got a good week to practice, and just need to focus on doing everything to get better each day."

Or, as Bergeron put it: "Go have some fun."

Because for this team, a missed shot isn't the end of the point. Sometimes, it's the start of a laugh.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon University junior Alexis Nyborg and senior Madison Cordisco during their doubles match against Coastal Carolina's sophomore Brunelle Kouam and freshman Francisca Laundes. Nyborg and Cordisco won the match, 6 to 2.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon University juniors Simone Bergeron and Mariana Reding during their doubles match against Coastal Carolina University's Aida Mitrache and Brooke Rogers. Bergeron and Reding won the match, 6 to 1.