TECHNOLOGY
SPECIAL EDITION

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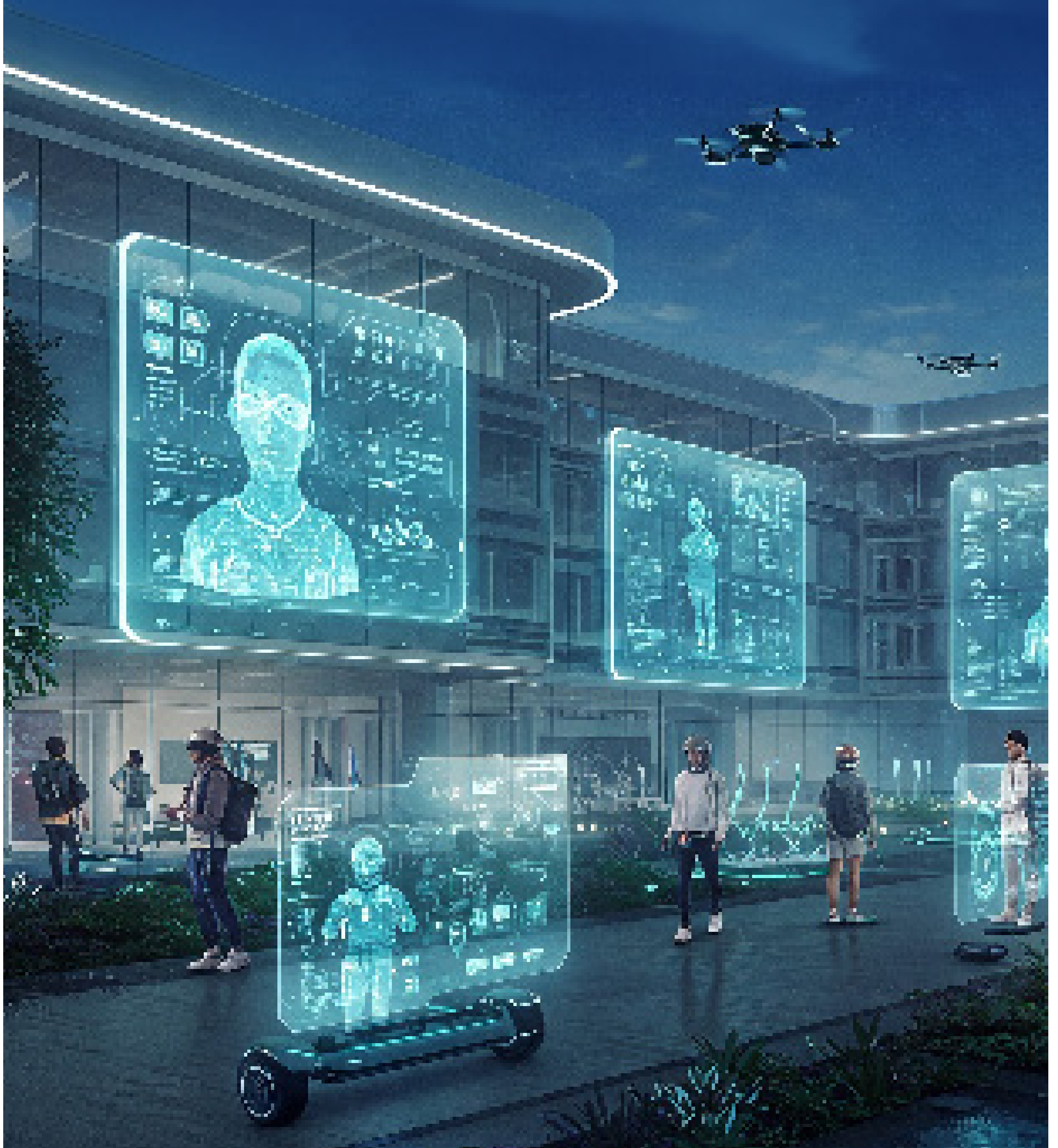
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CORRECTIONS

In the last edition of The Pendulum, Elon Medallion recipient Gerald Whittington was listed as a member of Elon's Board of Trustees but is a senior vice president emeritus. Elon News Network regrets this error.

Elon hosts Datafest to advance data competency on campus

The second-annual event hosted by Data Nexus will be held April 10 through 14

Sarah T. Moore
Elon News Network

ENN FILE PHOTO

Elon will host its second-annual Datafest April 10 through 14.

In the 21st century, data shapes many people's daily lives. From making curated recommendations on streaming platforms to targeted advertisements and weather forecasts, there is a growing demand for data competency.

From April 10 to 14, Elon University's Data Nexus will host its second Datafest. The four-day event will contain workshops, a "Hack-a-thon," a creative artificial intelligence contest, a keynote speaker, networking opportunities and the American Statistical Association's DataFest Data Challenge.

Director of Data Nexus and mathematics professor Crista Arangala said she hopes Datafest encourages students to reflect on the roles data plays in their daily lives. Arangala said this is why the keynote and main workshops center on music. Arangala said the theme being music showcases the interdisciplinary uses of data and makes Datafest more approachable to a wider range of students.

"I think a lot of students might find it fun to think about, say, their Spotify data or something that's more something they can connect with," Arangala said.

The keynote presentation, "AI's Music Problem & Music's AI Problem," will be presented by Christopher White, a music theory professor at University of Massachusetts, Amherst. White will also be leading a two-part workshop on analyzing data to study — and even generate — music.

The workshops, hack-a-thon and other elements of this year's Datafest are expansions from Elon's inaugural event last year. At the core of Datafest is the ASA's annual challenge, which encourages teams of undergraduate students to "work around the clock to find and share meaning in a large, rich and complex data set," according to the ASA DataFest website.

Elon is one of over 100 colleges and universities across the world participating in ASA's DataFest this year. While different DataFest events happen throughout the spring, each participating school receives the same prompt and data. In 2024, students were given data from CourseKata — an online, interactive statistics textbook. The students were told to "analyze computer logs that document students' interactions with online introductory statistics textbooks in order to help researchers improve the CourseKata experience for students."

The participants will present to a panel of judges, including Elon alumni, who will award categories such as "Best in Show," "Best Data Visualization" and "Best Use of an External Source."

Arangala said each team will have two to five students and a mentor, many of whom are alumni — including some who participated in Datafest last year.

Students who want to participate can register as part of a team or as individuals. Those who sign up without a team will be assigned to groups. This year, the competition will have two divisions: novice and upperclass. Arangala said splitting the contest into divisions was based on feedback from last year's participants.

Bringing Datafest to Elon is part of a wider campus initiative, Data Nexus. Arangala said Data Nexus was created to oversee the implementation of Elon's five-year Quality Enhancement Plan, which is part of the university's accreditation process.

"One of the goals in that plan is around advanced data competency," Arangala said. "Data Nexus offers workshops, events like datafests, speakers, to expose faculty to sort of advanced levels of how to use data."

Advanced data competency demonstrates a wide knowledge and understanding of how to use and interpret data in different fields. Arangala said while data plays an obvious role in some majors, such as business and statistics, she hopes Datafest can encourage students from all fields to think about ways they can use data.

"I want students to feel invited to just try datafest," Arangala said. "I think it's an experience that all students get something out of and definitely something that they can put on their resume, they can learn from."

Students can register for the DataFest Data challenge, Creative AI + Data Image contest, the workshops and keynote speech through the Data Nexus website. Registration for both the AI contest and the data challenge close April 11 or when spots are full.

This year, the data challenge will be capped at 40 students, which is an increase from last year when there were 30 spots.

"I talk a lot with students about how to use their data experiences and uplift them in a way with data portfolios, or different ways to uplift those experiences when looking for internships or jobs," Arangala said.

DATAFEST REGISTRATION

ELON DATAFEST EVENTS

* REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Thursday April 10 (3:30 to 5 p.m.) and Saturday April 12 (9:30 to 11 a.m.)*

In this interactive two-part workshop, Chris White, professor of music theory at the University of Massachusetts, introduces students — whether musicians, data enthusiasts or those new to computational methods — to the exciting ways that statistics and computational modeling can be used to study and generate music. No prior experience in programming or music theory is required.

Workshop 1: Understanding Musical Data
Workshop 2: Modeling and Generating Music Building on these concepts

Students who complete both of the workshops in the series will be eligible for the Data and Creative Arts Microcredential.

Friday April 11 – All events in Founder's Hall Atrium*
4:30 to 5:30 p.m. Keynote: AI's Music Problem & Music's AI Problem, Chris White, professor of music theory at the University of Massachusetts.
5:30 to 7 p.m. Hack-a-thon, pizza party open to all, and Data Challenge Meet the Mentor and give aways
7 p.m. Data Challenge and Creative AI + Data Image Contest Begin

Saturday April 12
Data Challenge and Creative AI + Data Image Contest participants work on their contest.
Data Challenge team members meet with their assigned mentor(s).

Sunday April 13
Data Challenge and Creative AI + Data Image Contest participants work on their contest. All contest submissions due at 7 p.m.
Data Challenge submissions will be on OneDrive, Creative AI + Data Image submissions will be on Moodle.

Monday April 14
4:30 to 5:30 p.m. Concurrent sessions.
Creative AI + Data Submissions on display for judging in Founders Hall Atrium
Data Challenge team members should plan to be in attendance to present their results for judging.

NIA BEDARD | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Senior honors fellow Aubrey Spicola tests her honors thesis at Innovation Hall on March 24.

SENIOR SHOWS OFF THE STARS USING VIRTUAL REALITY

Honors fellow develops thesis project of virtual reality planetarium with help of research mentor

Nia Bedard
Elon News Network

Senior Aubrey Spicola will never forget the first time she watched a star being born.

She was taking astronomy during the fall semester of her freshman year and one of the first labs she participated in was looking at nebulae, giant clouds of dust and gas that are remnants of dying stars and beginnings of new stars, and she was in awe of what she witnessed.

"We looked at the Orion Nebula through the telescope," Spicola said. "I could make out this little blue and pink smudge in the lens and I was like, 'Oh my God. Stars are being born in that thing.'"

At that moment Spicola, now a senior astrophysics major and honors fellow, had figured out what she wanted to spend her life studying.

"I found out what I wanted to do for the rest of my life," Spicola said. "This is it, this makes sense, I like it. Every time I come back I see something interesting and I was like, 'Why not?'"

After taking astronomy her freshman year, Spicola continued immersing herself in the stars by working a job at the Schiele Museum of Natural History and Planetarium during the summer of 2022.

"That's when the James Webb Telescope images came out," Spicola said. "I just thought it was so cool, and we held a watch party there."

Spicola worked there throughout the summer and through the first semester of her sophomore year, and during that time she started writing planetarium shows for the museum. After deciding to leave the job in December 2024, Spicola returned to Elon with a different decision to make.

What would she create for her thesis?

As an honors fellow, part of the program includes students engaging in the study of some sort of defined problem or question over the course of one and a half to two years.

With Spicola's major in astrophysics and her love of planetarium education she was able to develop her thesis with the help of her mentor and astrophysics professor Anthony Crider.

"The idea of research was so daunting to me, I didn't know what I wanted to do," Spicola said. "I talked to Dr. Crider and he said, 'Well, I haven't done this a while, but what do you think about a VR project?' I was like, 'That sounds pretty cool.'"

As a part of the thesis development process, each honors fellow has a faculty mentor to assist them with the creation of their thesis.

"She really wanted to do something just a little bit more creative," Crider said. "Something a little bit that sort of tied to her love for teaching people about astronomy."

Previous Elon students have created projects utilizing virtual reality and astronomy such as Sam Kahle's '14 Interactive Media project, which taught users about phases of the moon and Anna Sizemore G '20, who created an interactive VR game where the user points out constellations in the sky.

Spicola's honors thesis is a virtual reality planetarium app that allows users to see stars and planets as well as listen to an instructor, who is also wearing a VR headset, guiding the user through the VR planetarium.

"Being in a planetarium and having a live show is an experience," Spicola said, "But it's not something that you can get at a school like Elon. In virtual space, you can do pretty much anything."

While VR planetariums are not a new concept, Spicola adding an instructor makes the app mixed reality, which according to Crider and Spicola had not been done before. This means that the user can see both virtual and augmented reality.

Crider also said he believes a project like this would be the next step for planetariums. This past fall Crider and Spicola attended the International Planetarium Society Conference and found that mixed reality was on the minds of experts in that field.

"It was sort of on the tips of everyone's tongues," Crider said. "It was nice to sort of see that this was a project that was sort of at the cutting edge of what people are thinking about in putting out there."

Having settled on her thesis, Spicola began testing out the MetaQuest 3, a VR headset she got for Christmas, teaching herself how to code in C# and slowly started developing her app using the game development engine, Unity, to prepare for her thesis proposal in the fall of her junior year.

In addition to teaching herself how to code, Spicola reviewed pre-existing literature that utilizes VR. While she didn't find any research about using VR to create a planetarium, she ultimately discovered that she wants VR to be a bridge when it comes to education.

"I would like to get it to the point where someone can take this and then do more of an education focused project with it," Spicola said. "If you're learning about constellations, or if you're learning about the motion of the sky, I want to see what kind of effects this application has on the education factor. I think it's a very powerful thing to take something that's two dimensional and now you have it in 3D in a virtual space, rather than just looking at a lot of screens."
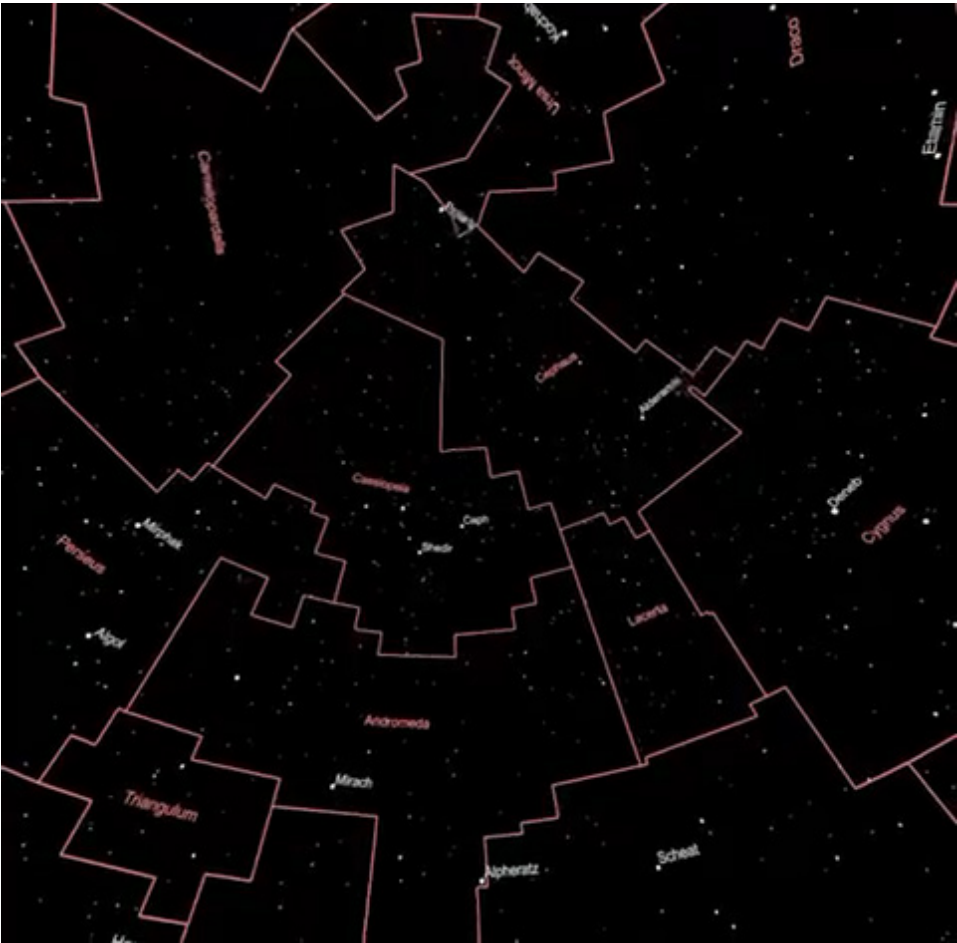
Now in her senior year, Spicola is focused on pushing the app further. She and Crider meet twice a week to test, discuss and edit the new versions of the app Spicola brings in on a weekly basis. According to Spicola the app is now in a place where the user can see a clear sky full of stars and see and communicate with the instructor.

"The multiplayer works," Spicola said. "It can be kind of flaky right now, just like with different objects that you might be handing off to another player. We have the star field in there. We have the ability to see each other. We know how to orient it correctly, all that kind of stuff."

While Spicola's thesis is functioning, the app is meant to show how virtual reality can be used in education rather than creating an app.

"This is meant to be sort of a proof of principle, a pilot project," Crider said. "We're not a software developer house. It's not like a team of us working on this, but it is something that was really interesting, and I thought it would be interesting to the larger community."

As Spicola heads into the final months of her senior year, she's preparing to wrap up her thesis, which she hopes showcases the educational capabilities of virtual reality, and move on to graduate school next fall.

COURTESY OF AUBREY SPICOLA

Senior Audrey Spicola's honors thesis is a VR planetarium that includes an instructor guiding the user through the app.

SPDC uses AI platform for student alumni connections

ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR

Kenny Bores of SMT talks to students interested in the company on Feb. 18 during the Elon Career Fair in Alumni Gym.

Elon Q&A has seen 367 student-asked questions, 978 alumni responses since September 2024

Evan Cooper
Elon News Network

With under three months until graduation, the Student Professional Development Center has continued to use Elon Q&A, a new tool implemented in the fall semester, utilizing AI to connect students with alumni.

Elon Q&A was implemented in September 2024, and assistant vice president for SPDC Brooke Buffington said the platform has been an easy and effective way to get students to connect with alumni.

"Elon Q&A is a tool that allows us to create an opportunity for students to have immediate access to alumni," Buffington said. "They just put in a question, and that question goes directly to alumni, and they receive an answer. It's a really low risk, high reward for students to connect with alumni

and for alumni to connect back with campus and current students."

As of March 24, 2025, Elon Q&A has seen 367 student-asked questions and 978 alumni responses. This is over half of their one-year goal of 500 questions, and near completion of their one-year goal of 1,000 responses.

Elon Q&A uses AI to search for keywords in a student's question, then searches the alumni database for a relevant connection. Once a match is found the AI sends the question, then sends a response back to the student when the question is answered.

According to self-reported data, Elon's class of 2024 reports that 92% of graduates are employed, accepted to graduate school, completing an internship or working for a service organization three months post-graduation. Comparatively, 96% of the class of 2023 was employed, in graduate school or doing service within nine months of graduation.

The data comes from the SPDC, the on-campus office for career opportunities, professional development advisory and networking. These results are collected

from a survey sent to alumni and data pulled from LinkedIn.

Looking at last year's graduating class, 78% of graduates are employed, 17% are accepted into a graduate school and 2% are traveling.

> YOU NEED ALUMNI WHO ARE EXCITED AND READY TO BE A RESOURCE. AND THAT WAS THE NUMBER ONE THING WE'VE HEARD BACK FROM ALUMS — IS THEY WANT TO BE A RESOURCE.

KENDRA HASKINS
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

Along with these results, 93% of the class of 2024 reporting employment said that their position aligns with their career objective. Comparatively, 96% of the class of 2023 reporting employment said that their position was related to their objectives.

The three-month data was collected over a two-week period three months after the graduation date. For students who graduated in Spring 2024, the data was collected from Aug. 24 to Sept. 7, 2024.

The Student Professional Development Center is open to students of all grade levels who need career guidance, Buffington, said.

"We want to help you with every juncture in your professional development, deciding what to major in and what that means for your future internships, full time jobs and job search," Buffington said. "Our students are having to navigate a lot of different application processes, and we want to make sure that they have the tools to do so."

The SPDC collaborates with other campus

organizations to assist students. The SPDC partnered with the Office of Alumni Engagement on Elon Q&A. Elon Q&A can be used without an account.

Kendra Haskins, senior director of Alumni Engagement, said the platform is a great way for students to build a network, as the questions they ask can lead to more in-depth conversations with alumni.

"If you, as a woman, would love to connect with another woman you can make that request," Haskins said. "If you were a football player and would love to find out from other football players who went into finance, did that impact you or did you find it helpful? You can connect people with shared experiences or identities … and the AI will do its best to find alumni who match that."

Haskins said the AI helps alumni stay engaged with Elon, connecting with the student body and acting as a resource for networking, professional development or casual conversation.

"You need alumni who are excited and ready to be a resource," Haskins said. "And that was the number one thing we've heard back from alums, is they want to be a resource."

The SPDC also manages the Elon Job Network — a website that provides access to vetted job openings on and off campus and a place to create appointments with the SPDC.

The Elon Job Network allows students to create a public profile, listing their skills, experience and what jobs they are interested in. This information helps the SPDC personalize their advising for each student.

The SPDC also hosts career fairs to allow students to meet employers in their desired field. The final career fair for the spring semester will be the Health Professions Fair from 3 to 4:30 p.m. March 26 in Lindner Hall.

IF YOU GO

The final career fair for the spring semester will be the Health Professions Fair from 3 to 4:30 p.m. March 26 in Lindner Hall.
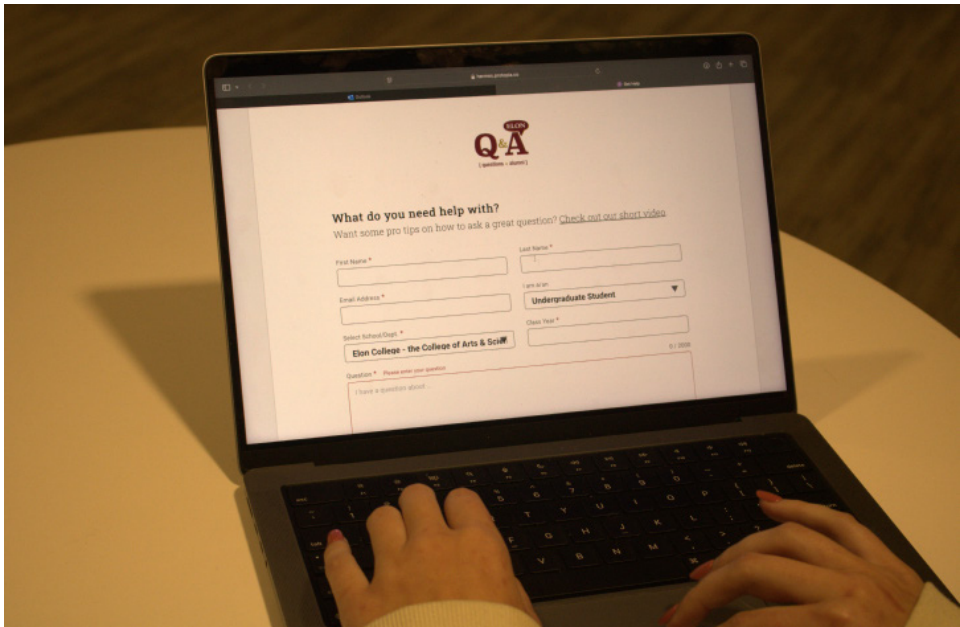
AVERY SLOAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Photo illustration of student using the Student Professional Development Center's AI platform, Elon Q&A.

Technology creates Oklahoma in Elon for production of 'Grapes of Wrath'

MEGAN WALSH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The cast of Grapes of Wrath rehearses the moment the Joad family leaves in a stand-in version of the truck prop for California in rehearsal March 12 in Scott Studios.

The show will run April 3 through 5 in McCrary Theatre, set in 1930s Oklahoma

Megan Walsh
Elon News Network

Dust storms, the Colorado River, a large thunderstorm and a flood — all major plot points of Elon University's production of "Grapes of Wrath" where technology plays a large role.

The show, based on the novel by John Steinbeck, will be performed April 3 to 5 in McCrary Theatre.

"Grapes of Wrath" is set in the mid-1930s during the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. The show follows the Joad family as they lose their home in Oklahoma and go on a journey to California in search of a better life.

The story of the Joads is not unusual for the time period as the director of the show, professor of the performing arts Julian Stetkevych, said many people were fleeing the Dust Bowl.

> ## LIGHT DESIGN TELLS THE STORY THROUGH SHIFTING WHICH PARTS OF THE STAGE WE'RE LIGHTING.
>
> **JULIAN STETKEVYCH**
> SHOW DIRECTOR

"They and many other Oklahomans, called Okies in the show, were pretty much forced to leave their farms, their lands, and try to find a place to make a better life," Stetkevych said. "They were migrants within their own country."

Throughout the first act of the show, Stetkevych said the setting changes often, and these changes are portrayed with the help of lighting and sound design.

"Light design tells the story through shifting which parts of the stage we're lighting, which lets us know we're in a new location. Sound design will do some of that work as well," Stetkevych said. "When we have a transition, there's sound during it, either played live or recorded sound, and that, again, helps the audience understand we're moving, something's changing."

Lighting design is being produced by professor of the performing arts Mitch Fore. He said that there are many elements where lighting will play a large role.

"There's a dust storm that's being staged at the beginning to sort of set the scene," Fore said. "Then they reach the Colorado River halfway through the first act, and then there's a storm and a flood and all kinds of stuff at the very end."

Fore said lighting is important in theatre to set the mood of scenes and establish where onstage audiences should be focused.

"Very often the highest compliment you can pay to lighting is that you don't really notice it, but it seems to fit and is appropriate," Fore said.

Much of the process for figuring out the lighting for the show Fore said will happen once the show begins technical production rehearsals in McCrary Theatre this week.

Before spring break, Fore said he attended a rehearsal run-through to get ideas ahead of time. He said the lighting for the show is meant to be more theatrical than realistic for each setting in the show.

"We're not recreating Oklahoma and Colorado and California and all those places that they stop on the way, nor are we recreating the different places that they are in California," Fore said. "It's all very theatrical and presentational."

Junior Parker Felumlee plays one of the leading characters, Tom Joad. He said he sees lighting as important to help audience members interact with the fictional world of the show.

"I know that lighting in particular is super important in that world that we're building," Felumlee said. "The lights alone are going to set us up in individual scenes and create a river and things like that, which I'm really excited to see."

Sound design is being produced by professor of performing arts Micheal Smith, who said that sound plays an important role in showing emotions and key themes through both sounds and music.

"Sounds create mood, create atmosphere," Smith said. "They can heighten the sense of awareness. They can change focus."

> ## " I KNOW THAT LIGHTING IN PARTICULAR IS SUPER IMPORTANT IN THAT WORLD THAT WE'RE BUILDING.
>
> **PARKER FELUMLEE**
> ELON JUNIOR

Smith said the process for sound usually begins with pulling ideas from the script of the work. Some of the key elements of sound include placing speakers as well as deciding the volume and timing of sounds, he said.

For "Grapes of Wrath," Smith said there will be speakers placed in the balcony of McCrary Theatre to help create the distant sound needed for the storm scene in the show. He also said that the sound will have a certain feel to it to match the time period of the show.

"A lot of the sounds are going to have a certain kind of sonic texture to them that plays into what the Dust Bowl is," Smith said. "These people are struggling. These people are gritty. These people are earthy. These people have a certain property to them, and I think that the sound needs to portray that."

Junior Caroline Moore plays another leading character, Ma Joad, and said she feels sounds from both actors playing instruments onstage and the ones added by Smith will be impactful to the show.

"The sound cues that are going to come from the rain or the wind and the tree crashing at the end, and just really big sounds that we can't make as an ensemble are going to be some of the most impactful things to add underneath our acting," Moore said. "It's going to help us as actors really hone in on the story and the circumstances, and it's going to help the audience have a much better picture painted than if it wasn't there."

Felumlee said the show has a pretty heavy tone including events that happen before the show begins such as the family losing their home and his character killing a man. Stetkevych said he had the cast improvise and pretend to experience these events during rehearsal so that when they are mentioned in the show, the actors would have emotions to draw from.

Despite the dark tone, there are moments of joy. For Moore, she enjoys the dance scene that she gets to watch most of the cast do together.

"Although I'm not dancing with them, it's so joyous to just watch them having so much fun and putting their characterizations into their movement," Moore said. "It's just a really happy part of the show in general as well, and I think the audience is really going to appreciate that moment of just pure bliss and fun on stage while everyone's dancing."

Stetkevych said he enjoys the joy of the scene where the Joad family reaches the Colorado River in Act One after being surrounded by the dustiness of the Dust Bowl.

"It's one of those other moments of joy in kind of, a cleanliness way, or as you can imagine all your family getting to the river after a long family drive or walk, and everyone jumps in," Stetkevych said. "There's something joyful about water."

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AI enters Elon courses as a classmate

Faculty integrate AI as a learning partner for students, teach competency and strategies

Katharyn MacDonald
Elon News Network

Helen Orr, professor of religious studies, wasn't surprised when the boom of generative artificial intelligence hit, nor by its high level of influence on education and technology use. Her partner focuses on AI and human-computer interaction as a computer scientist, so she said she could see the shift coming. She wanted to get started right away, using her course that she can develop with a religion topic of her choice as an opportunity to make an AI-focused course last year. She now teaches REL1702: Religion and AI course every semester to students of all grade levels, majors and experience levels with AI.

This course is one of the many indicators that the rise of AI tool integration and software has changed the way Elon University approaches AI inside and outside of the traditional classroom setting. ElonGPT is an AI chatbot that provides information and answers questions about the university. The Elon AI Hub provides links to resources for learning more about AI and how to use it, as well as AI tools that are free for students' to use. The Center for Design Thinking launched a student-led workshop this semester entitled 'How might we use AI for more effective problem-solving?'

As a response to the questions raised today surrounding AI's role in higher education, Elon University created six principles of its own in October 2024: human-centered work, overcoming the digital divide, information literacy, responsibility, learning evolving technology and using AI as a tool rather than a replacement were the goals set.

Nearly a year and a half later, these principles have led some faculty to incorporate AI tool use and experimentation, from the brainstorming stage to final edits.

Religion and AI

When Orr first pitched the idea for her religion and AI course, she said AI was treated like a specialty or novelty topic.

"I would say even when generative AI first came out, I did not get the impression that people realized what a big deal it was," Orr said. "Now we're at the point where it's so clear to everyone that it's going to be integrated into everything."

Orr's course relates critical thinking skills foundational to religious studies and relates them to how AI gathers and presents its information. The understanding of intersectionality, historical context and diversity of thought and experience within groups is applied to scrutinize generative AI outputs.

"When so much of its training data is based upon a white male Protestant population, or often white and Asian men, algorithmic bias is such a big concern," Orr said.

Orr said her biggest successes within the course have been a prompt engineering workshop and an algorithmic bias workshop.

"I think my students have been responding well, and I think that it allows creativity to flourish," Orr said.

> ## NOW WE'RE AT THE POINT WHERE IT'S SO CLEAR TO EVERYONE THAT IT'S GOING TO BE INTEGRATED INTO EVERYTHING.
>
> **HELEN ORR**
> PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Orr also integrates AI into the introductory course for religious studies by having students use it to check sources or edit their writing.

"Students quickly learn that AI hallucinates," Orr said. "AI makes mistakes. So it can also be an empowering experience in the sense that you realize, 'Oh, I have to check this tool or keep it in line a little bit to do good work.'"

Student-to-student and professor-to-student

Professor of strategic communications Michele Lashley has regular student exercises brainstorming and writing with ChatGPT in her courses. The exercises involve forming an idea, asking ChatGPT to refine it, and further prompting edits and specific requests from the chatbot until satisfied with the product. Lashley said figuring out what prompts generative AI respond best to through experimenting is important for students to learn.

"I take the responsibility of preparing my students for life after Elon really seriously," Lashley said. "Because of the nature of the field that we're in in terms of communications, there's no ignoring AI. It's here. We don't know what that's going to look like because it's changing so quickly, but I don't want my students to be afraid of it."

Lashley, who teaches all grade levels from strategic communications courses to COM4000: Media Law and Ethics, has had Center for Design Thinking workshops come to her classes multiple times. She said she was impressed with the 'How might we use AI for more effective problem-solving?' workshop, which is new this semester.

"It's all about preparing students to be empowered when they leave Elon to start working," Lashley said. "I don't want my students to feel like AI is off limits to them, but I do want them to learn how to use it effectively and ethically, and the only way I can teach them how to do that is to actually use it in class."

Lashley said she understands the perspectives of those who are hesitant to use AI because of the association with using it as a replacement for critical thinking and as a crutch instead of a tool. She said she tries to give students clear guidelines about when and how AI should be used, but that students' use can't be constantly monitored. Still, she said she is passionate about incorporating AI into all of her classes.

"AI is here and it's not going anywhere," Lashley said. "We can't just say, 'Well, it's going to decrease their critical thinking skills.' Maybe in some cases, if we're not teaching students how to use it correctly, but not if we teach them how to use it in a way that supplements and complements their creative thinking."

A strategy Lashley has to implement this is asking students to submit to her the prompt they put into an AI chatbot, the AI output, and how they modified it.

"It's not about seeing whether they've cheated or not," Lashley said. "It's just so I can see how they process things. I'm giving them permission to use it, but I want to see their work. It's like a math problem."

Lashley said she's gotten helpful feedback from her students, and that they have accepted and been excited about the AI use in her classes.

"I find that students like working with AI," Lashley said. "They're just not quite sure about how to do it yet."

independently and creatively is part of what makes us human.

"The majority of opinions I've seen at Elon, if not all, are really positive toward AI," Shartzer said. "Everyone's saying, 'It's so unique. It's just like a fantastical innovation from the future. But at what cost?"

Student responses

Sophomore computer science and communication design student Sophie Shartzer felt that AI is being incorporated too deeply into education at Elon.

"I think AI is really bad for the environment, for our creativity, for humankind, for jobs," Shartzer said. "Ethically, I just think it's a bad idea."

Softwares such as the Microsoft Suite and Canva that are heavily used in Elon courses have added AI-powered design elements, from providing suggestions for layout to creating custom templates based on prompts to fully-AI art. Shartzer said a main concern for her and for fellow graphic designers is that generative AI creating art will eliminate jobs and diminish art and design.

"Unfortunately, I think a lot of times with Elon, a lot of people aren't really thinking about the people's jobs that are lost," Shartzer said. "Also about how bad it is for the environment, I feel like people aren't really thinking about that."

Shartzer said that while AI can make workloads less difficult and faster to complete, working hard and thinking

KATHARYN MACDONALD | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Professor of religious studies Helen Orr teaches her special topic course REL 1720: Religion and AI on March 13.

...but some students use it differently

Elon survey finds that 52% of U.S. adults now use AI, but Elon student opinions vary

Virginia Vance
Elon News Network

Chris Iwicki sat in the Great Hall in Global Commons, scribbling notes on a small notecard. He glanced up at his laptop periodically. He was studying. He was studying the day before, too, but he wasn't relying on a notecard: He was asking ChatGPT to explain a math formula.

According to a March 12 survey from Elon's Imagining the Digital Future Center, 52% of U.S. adults now use AI large language models like ChatGPT or Google's Gemini. The survey noted that twice as many respondents said they used AI mostly for personal learning or planning compared to those who mostly use AI for work.

Here at Elon, some students — Iwicki included — use AI not for work or personal use, but as a way to study.

A common thread across students was that AI should be used for the right reasons. But which reasons are the right ones is less consistent.

Freshman Eddie Fermanian, who's majoring in theatrical design technology, said he uses ChatGPT for his resume and to brainstorm for essay assignments.

"As long as you're not using it to pass off as your own work," Fermanian said of AI's acceptable use.

> ## I THINK IF YOU NEED HELP COMING UP WITH A BUNCH OF IDEAS FOR SOMETHING THAT'S NOT NECESSARILY AN ASSIGNMENT, MAYBE A TITLE OR SOMETHING, THEN THAT WOULDN'T BE TERRIBLE.
>
> **KENZI MANESS**
> ELON FRESHMAN

Freshman Kenzi Maness, who is double majoring in history and political science, also saw AI use as acceptable when used for brainstorming.

"I think if you need help coming up with a bunch of ideas for something that's not necessarily an assignment, maybe a title or something, then that wouldn't be terrible," Maness said. "But using it to write your whole entire essay or something like that would be not using it in the correct way."

Maness herself uses AI for reorganizing her study guides, which she described as putting her words in a different order rather than an AI model generating words for her. Iwicki, a senior finance major, said ChatGPT was helpful for clarifying concepts when he was confused by a professor's explanation.

However, professor Sims Osborne, who teaches computer science at Elon, said that getting explanations from AI comes with the risk of learning something incorrectly.

"People can be wrong too, of course, but I feel like people are more likely to blindly trust LLMs than other people," Osborne said.

Carroll said she could never see herself using AI for school.

"I tried it once with an organic chemistry question, and it just got it completely wrong," Carroll said.

Osborne said ChatGPT, and other large language AI models like it, are very good at sounding confident because they can provide relevant words, but those words aren't necessarily being used correctly.

"I use that for helping multiple choice questions," Osborne said, "because, if you've ever tried to write a multiple-choice test, it's really hard to come up with incorrect answers that sound good. ChatGPT is wonderful for that."

However, Osborne isn't fully against AI in the classroom. She said that, while the students in her introductory computer science courses can be easily misled by incorrect answers to broad prompts, students with a strong grounding in fundamental concepts can sometimes benefit from more specific questions.

"It's the difference between if you're asking a friend, 'Hey, do you know how to do this one thing?' where the answer would be a 30-second answer, vs 'Hey, can you do my homework for me?'" Osborne said.

Elon's Office of the Provost provides a generative AI statement on its website, which states that students are responsible for adhering to AI policies set by faculty. One of the prohibited behaviors in the "Cheating" section of the 2024-2025 Elon University student handbook is using technology not previously authorized by an instructor for a test or evaluation. In other words, while AI may be useful, students can still be penalized for using it inappropriately.

Junior biochemistry major Elizabeth Carroll does not use AI, and said "there are a lot of things that people need to do themselves," but also said AI could be an acceptable starting point.

Mackenzie Pridgen, a sophomore majoring in acting and arts administration, said AI models could provide more specific answers than a normal web search.

STATEMENTS FROM PEER INSTITUTIONS REGARDING ICE

"We have students, faculty, probably staff, who may not be undocumented themselves, but they may have family members who are undocumented, or who have immigration status issues. We have international students who are here on visas, and those are immigration issues as well. And there just may be people in your neighborhood or community or hometown or church, or whatever the case might be, who are directly impacted." - Vice Provost of Student Affairs at Gonzaga, said in an interview with the Gonzaga Bulletin

"The United States government, through certain federal agencies, may attempt to contact University employees for immigration-related information about a particular international student, staff or faculty member." - Lehigh University Office of International Students and Scholars

"Bucknell has released a response protocol in the event that Immigration and Customs Enforcement [ICE] agents visit campus unannounced." - Bucknell University, Editor-in-Chief of the Bucknellian

"We are navigating the wide array of issues and analyzing still-emerging details of the actions." - American University President

"Unless law enforcement officers are responding to a lawful request, Fordham Public Safety will not allow them on campus, nor share any student or employee information with law enforcement." - Fordham University Safety and Security

"We are in a fluid situation and are still learning its full scope and impact. Please be patient as we evaluate unfolding actions to determine what they might mean for our University." - President of Southern Methodist University

"If a law enforcement agent requests information or seeks to contact a student or employee in person, a DU employee should escort [or ask Campus Safety to escort] the individual to either the Office of General Counsel [during business hours] or Department of Campus Safety [outside of business hours]." - The Office of General Counsel at University of Denver

"The University has an obligation to comply with the law, particularly when a law enforcement agency has a legal subpoena or warrant." - Syracuse University Department of Safety

University yet to make statement to student body on Trump immigration policy, ICE concerns

With Trump's deployment of ICE across the country, universities precede with caution

Nia Bedard
Elon News Network

With President Donald Trump back in office for his second term, one of his first of many executive orders shortly after he was sworn into office was called "Protecting the American people against invasion," which is intended to limit the number of people entering the U.S. through the southern border.

According to the executive order, the Department of Homeland Security can now set new enforcement policies, expand the use of expedited removal and authorize state and local law enforcement to investigate, detain and apprehend people who are in the country illegally.

While Elon University is a private university and is not as reliant on federal funding as a public institution, university administration is not planning to send out an official statement regarding ICE to the entire student body. According to Elon spokesperson Eric Townsend, a memorandum was sent out from President Connie Book to Elon University vice presidents, deans and senior staff Feb. 17 regarding university protocol after the signing of Trump's executive orders.

According to the memorandum, university leadership is monitoring the implications of the executive orders on higher education as well as how other higher education institutions are reacting to the executive orders through injunctions and amicus briefs.

"The leadership team, with guidance from legal counsel, examines each unique situation to understand the legal and regulatory requirements as they are proposed, changed or litigated," Book wrote in the memorandum. "In each case, the university keeps at the forefront its commitment to fully support the educational priorities and goals of its mission. Elon is monitoring the progress of these cases and, as appropriate, will join amicus briefs in the coming months as these cases progress through the courts."

In addition to the DHS, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Attorney General Pamela Bondi are limiting humanitarian parole, the designations of temporary protected status and employment authorization. This also includes denying federal funding to any sanctuary cities that interfere with the enforcement of these operations.

The executive order also states that any person who is in the country illegally must register their presence and failure to do so will be treated as a civil and criminal enforcement priority.

The implementation of this executive order has led to Immigration and Customs Enforcement entering churches and public schools until a Maryland federal judge blocked ICE agents from entering places of worship in February.

In addition to monitoring other cases and other institutions, the memorandum stated that regarding the recent executive orders, Elon University will only respond to judicial warrants and subpoenas.

Immigration lawyer and graduate of Elon Law '22, Dara Arroyo-Longoria said she was not surprised at Elon's lack of a public statement to the student body.

"As a Latina at Elon Law School, I didn't feel supported," Arroyo-Longoria said. "I can only imagine what an immigrant can feel, what an undocumented immigrant can feel on campus because it is something that I think Elon needs to just continuously work on, is to create a more safe environment for all students."

Since Elon University is a private institution, ICE cannot enter classrooms, buildings and dorms without a warrant, however in public spaces such as outdoor portions of campus, ICE can make an arrest.

According to Elon Campus Safety and Police classrooms, labs, residence halls and faculty/staff offices are closed to the public at all times and any visitor seeking information about students or employees, or asking for access to private areas of campus, should be directed to Campus Safety & Police.

"If they have a federal warrant, they can very much go into those spaces," Arroyo-Longoria said. "If I want to directly come outside, then it avoids them coming into the dorm and potentially encountering other students."

> ❝
> I CAN ONLY IMAGINE WHAT AN IMMIGRANT CAN FEEL, WHAT AN UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT CAN FEEL ON CAMPUS BECAUSE IT IS SOMETHING THAT I THINK ELON NEEDS TO JUST CONTINUOUSLY WORK ON, IS TO CREATE A MORE SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS.
>
> **DARA ARROYO-LONGORIA**
> IMMIGRATION LAWYER '22

The Trump administration is currently in the process of deporting a student visa-holder, Mahmoud Khalil, a former student at Columbia University, for his involvement in the campus protests against Israel.

"It's very much like it is, it is a visa." Arroyo-Longoria said. "So they could, in theory, revoke those at some point or in the future."

While ICE has not published arrest numbers after September 2024, ICE has been active in North Carolina. On March 18, ICE published a report regarding an arrest operation conducted in Charlotte from March 1 to 8 where 24 people who were in the country illegally were arrested.

Arroyo-Longoria said while Elon is a private university, giving federal agencies like ICE access to public spaces on campus could still put students who are here illegally at risk.

"This conversation about a public versus private space will matter a lot," Arroyo-Longoria said. "Let's say Elon says, 'Sure, yes, you can come wherever, whatever you need, we will help you.' That would be concerning because then that is the university giving them access to these private spaces that students would otherwise be protected in."

She also said Elon can take steps to protect their students by training their staff on what to do in this situation.

"Training staff in every building," Arroyo-Longoria said. "Any building that you need to be a student to enter, whether that's RA's, whether that's your front desk staff as well, you need staff to be able to feel safe enough to tell I say, 'Hey, you don't have permission to be here without a warrant.'"

Elon University is not the only university to not address the current executive orders from the Trump administration.

When compared to Elon's 15 peer institutions, seven of them — four private and three public — have not released any sort of statement to their student body. These universities are Chapman University, Furman University, James Madison University, Marquette University, Miami University, Oxford, Santa Clara University and William & Mary.

While Elon University is not planning on releasing a statement regarding ICE, according to Townsend, Arroyo-Longoria said the university should do as much as it can to keep its students safe, even if that information doesn't come from Book.

"I do think that there's things that anyone could be doing to help protect students," Arroyo-Longoria said. "It's important for students to feel safe, and I do think that means professors knowing what would happen if ICE comes in the middle of class. Those are all things that I would be advocating for before I send an email to all students, I would want to be able to legitimately say, 'Hey, these are the resources, and this is what you can do.'"

Student Government Association breaks down budget

SGA receives an annual budget of $436,000 to fund the over 150 organizations eligible for funding

Fiona McAllister
Elon News Network

Elon University's Student Government Association receives an annual budget of $436,000 to fund the over 150 campus organizations eligible for funding, according to Elon senior and Vice President of Finance Clare Ruldolph. The budget for SGA is part of Vice President for Student Life Jon Dooley's budget, made up from student activity fees — which are $292 per person per year. But the $436,000 does not include the additional budget SGA receives that is used up to its discretion.

"A portion is designated for honorary organizations and operating expenses for SGA to function," Rudolph said in an email to Elon News Network.

SGA Executive President Taylor Cote said SGA receives a total of around $800,000. Cote said there is also a reserve fund that SGA can pull money from.

"If our working one is kind of getting low, for example, we'll pull from that one," Cote said. "So we always have that reserve budget so we can continue to fund things."

Ruldolph said that the $800,000 is specific toward this academic year. Annually, SGA receives $436,000 with

Student Government Association budget requests approved
SGA's budget requests approved for student organizations in the past three years

Bar chart:
- 2022-23: 557
- 2023-24: 837
- 2024- February 2025: 573
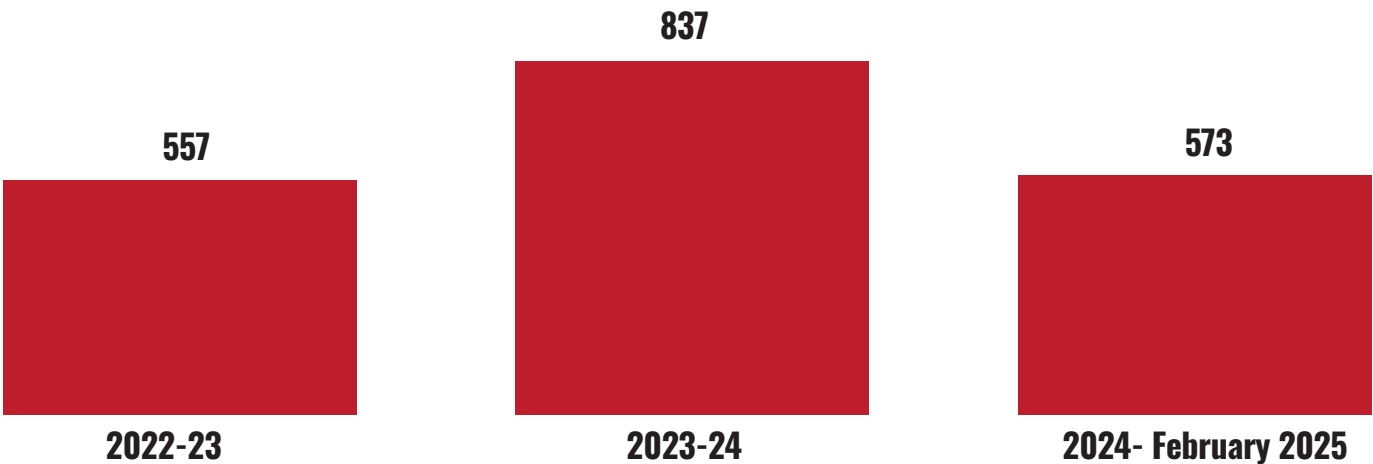
DATA VISUALIZATION BY FIONA MCALLISTER

the reserve fund varying depending on the year. This operational budget, if not used in total, rolls into the reserve fund. These two accounts are used for different purposes, the operational budget is used for organizations while the reserve fund is used for legislation.

For the over 150 approved campus organizations available to request funding, the 2022-23 academic year had only 557 budget requests approved. Compared to the 2023-24 academic year, SGA saw around a 50% increase in budget requests, resulting in 837 budget requests approved.

From the beginning of this academic year to February 2025, SGA has already surpassed the number of budget requests approved during the 2022-23 academic year with 573 requests approved for funding.

During the 2022-23 academic year, $304,000 was reimbursed across 97 different organizations. The numbers continue to grow per academic year. In 2023-24, $312,000 was reimbursed across 108 different organizations — similar to the current SGA funding reimbursement so far for the 2024-25 academic year. For

money that is not used in the SGA budget, it goes back into the reserve fund. Their reserve fund is capped at $436,000, any coverage beyond that amount will be returned back to Jon Dooley's budget.

For the 2025-26 academic year, SGA has passed new financial bylaws. The bylaws state SGA will cover the cost of conferences and other off-campus events. However, the expense of hotels, meals and mileage for personal vehicles will no longer be covered by SGA starting on June 1, 2025. Only flights, registration fees and university-owned vehicles will be covered.

Elon Poll finds North Carolinians are opposed to major federal agency cuts

Party affiliations major factor in difference of opinion on agency cuts, immigration, Trump approval

Nia Bedard
Elon News Network

With the establishment of the Department of Government Efficiency and cuts made to 14 federal agencies throughout President Donald Trump's first 100 days in office, most North Carolinians do not favor the cutbacks and elimination of federal agencies, according to a recent Elon Poll.

This poll, released March 25, found that a plurality of North Carolinians said they favor minor reductions or no change to the 14 agencies experiencing cuts including the Internal Revenue Service, U.S. Agency for International Development and most recently the Department of Education.

While most North Carolinians believe there should be some minor reduction or no change to federal agencies, out of the 800 North Carolina adults polled, 33% believe there should be an increase in funding for the Department of Education. This compares to 30% who believe there should be minor reductions or no change and 25% who believe there should be major reductions or the department should be eliminated.

Elon Poll found that though North Carolinians were mostly in favor of minor reduction or no change, there was a division between political party affiliations about cutting federal agencies.

According to Elon Poll, Republicans were more in favor of major cutbacks. 41% of Republicans favor the elimination of the U.S. Agency of International Development, 38% favor the elimination of the Department of Education and 30% favor the elimination of public broadcasting such as PBS and NPR.

Director of Elon Poll, Jason Husser, said while he wasn't surprised by the Republican support, he thought more Republicans would be more approving.

" EVEN AMONG PRESIDENT TRUMP'S BASE, THERE'S NOT WIDESPREAD SUPPORT FOR CUTTING MANY OF THE FEDERAL AGENCIES.

JASON HUSSER
DIRECTOR OF ELON POLL

"For the most part, we were finding that many Republicans did not want to see these cuts happen," Husser said. "Even among President Trump's base, there's not widespread support for cutting many of the federal agencies."

For North Carolina Democrats, Elon Poll found that they were more likely to favor no change or even an increase in funding with

51% of Democrats favoring an increase for the Department of Education and a 51% increase for the Center for Disease Control.

North Carolinians also have differing views on how this will affect the state based on their political affiliation.

Husser said that despite the difference in political views, North Carolina is a good state to poll on national issues such as presidential approval, immigration and federal agency cuts. According to Husser, Elon Poll's sample is meant to mirror North Carolina's demographic makeup.

"Typically, North Carolinians look, or have numbers that look, a lot like the rest of the country as a whole," Husser said. "Usually, North Carolina is within five percentage points of what we'd find in a national survey, and that's largely due to the fact that North Carolina is a swing state."

According to Elon Poll, 76% of North Carolina Democrats believe these federal agency cuts will have a negative impact on the state while 64% of Republicans believe the cuts will have a positive impact on North Carolina.

Elon Poll also found North Carolinians' trust in Elon Musk is also dependent on party affiliation with 85% of Democrats saying they completely or somewhat distrust Musk while 76% of Republicans completely or somewhat trust him.

Aside from federal agency cuts, the Elon Poll also assessed the Trump administrations' handling of immigration which was evenly split on whether it will have a positive or negative impact. However, Elon Poll did see a 17% decrease in supporting a program that provided a

pathway to citizenship to people who were in the country illegally. Previously Elon Poll assessed opinions about pathways to citizenship in 2013, when 80% of North Carolinians supported a path to citizenship.

In addition to immigration and federal agency cuts, Elon Poll assessed Trump's approval rating for his second term in office. Overall, 42% of North Carolinians approved of his performance while 45% disapproved. President Trump's disapproval ratings were highest amongst Democrats, Black people, women and people with four-year college degrees, while Trump's approval ratings were highest among Republicans, white people and men.

While this current poll focused on how North Carolinians feel about national issues, Husser said Elon Poll is currently surveying how Americans feel about national issues and will be publishing a poll about how North Carolinians feel about state issues.

FIND THE NEWEST ELON POLL HERE

Elon Poll respondents opinions on the Department of Education

The survey conducted March 3 to 11 and gathered opinions from 800 North Carolina adults and has a margin of error of +/- 4.04%.

- Favored increased funding — **33%**
- Favored eliminating/major reduction — **30%**
- Favored minor reduction or no change — **25%**

DATA VISUALIZATION BY AVERY SLOAN

North Carolinians surveyed have mixed opinions on funding for the Department of Education and overall a plurality of North Carolinians are opposed to major federal agency cuts.

ABSS 2025-26 budget passes, community members rally for pay increases

Employee benefit cost increases, operating expense increases are two main budget items

Avery Sloan
Elon News Network

After nine community members spoke during the budget hearing meeting, the Alamance-Burlington School System Board of Education unanimously passed the 2025-26 budget asking for a $5.7 million expansion from this year's budget — totaling to $59,047,151. The budget will now have to pass through the Alamance County Commissioners during the April 7 meeting.

Before the budget hearing began, close to 15 community members, mainly a part of the Alamance-Burlington Association of Educators, gathered in the parking lot sharing their own experiences of what brought them to speak out at the meeting. The ABAE had

two points they were focusing on: raising the pay for classified workers and restoring key positions cut in last year's budget — two pieces that are included in the new budget.

Employees who require a teaching license or certification are considered certified staff members — such as teachers and counselors — and classified staff members do not — such as custodians, bus drivers and administrative assistants.

Robert Alvis, president of the ABAE, said the group came to illustrate to share their own personal experiences and illustrate how much the budget affects.

Stuart Ringwalt, prior to the reduction in force put in place last budget period, was a media center coordinator at Walter Williams High School. But, after finding out he would now be responsible for the same role across two separate schools, he opted to switch roles to something that would place him only at one school. The reduction in force was put in place to cut down on costs after mold was found in 32 out of 36 schools in ABSS —

leading to an immediate cost of $25.8 million on mold remediation. He said the effects of the reduction in staff can be felt across his school.

"We've lost the library portion of the school and a lot of the resources that are available to teachers," Ringwalt said.

Paige Ysteboe, media coordinator for both Western Alamance Middle School and high school, said she was begging the school board to reinstate librarians in each school. Ysteboe has worked as a librarian for 35 years and said four years ago she went to the board to ask for help. The new amount of technology she was now responsible for on top of new challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic had made her job increasingly difficult, she said.

"I stood before this board in 2021 and told you it was too much that we could not effectively do our jobs without more help on the technology end," Ysteboe said. "When we were told that half of the middle and high school positions were being cut — I was flabbergasted."

Regenia Richardson, a math teacher at Williams High School, said one of her students arrives 30 minutes late to school every day — due to a shortage of bus drivers in the county, causing certain bus drivers to have to do multiple routes, making certain students consistently late. Richardson said this student misses her welcoming the students to school, her explaining what they will be learning and the beginning of the lesson.

"Imagine the student coming in after all this has transpired, sitting in a seat 35 minutes late, lost," Richardson said. "Imagine this happening every day for over two months so far, and the student's angry at the teacher because he wants to learn."

Sandy Ellington-Graves, ABSS Board of Education chair, said she wants the students to remain the first priority and for the Alamance County community to remember the stories that community members shared.

"It's hard to put a dollar sign on a child, and sometimes we focus so much on the dollars and cents in it, and we have to, but I look at it as their investments in our students, and I don't ever want us to forget those faces behind those dollars," Ellington-Graves said.

Board vacancy

Sixteen community members, including three Elon faculty members, applied for a spot on the board of education, after the board opened applications for the newly vacant position. Evan Sprinkle, dean of undergraduate admissions; Evan Small, professor in wellness; and Eric Hall, assistant provost for scholarship and creative activity, all applied. Ricky Hurtado, former state house representative, also applied. Chuck Marsh, former board member, stepped down from his role on Feb. 25, leaving an open seat.

The board decided that all 16 applicants would be given the opportunity to speak for three minutes each on why they applied for the role at the April 28 board meeting. The board then may vote at that meeting on who should fill the vacancy or wait until the following work session meeting. The new board member will be sworn in at the May 17 board meeting.

The next meeting will be held at 12:30 p.m. April 8 at 1712 Vaughn Road, Burlington.

AVERY SLOAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

President of the Alamance-Burlington Association of Educators Robert Alvis holds a petition that he and other local educators and community members signed to express their priorities for the Alamance-Burlington School System before the board of education budget hearing March 24.

Search for new Elon dean of students made confidential

Faculty, staff, students who attend the presentation dates are required to agree to confidentiality

Charlotte Pfabe
Elon News Network

As the search ramps up to fill Elon University's recently vacated dean of students position, the search team moved to make the process a more private matter, requiring faculty, staff and students who attend the presentations for finalists to agree to confidentiality.

In an email sent to faculty and staff the morning of March 20 from Jason Husser and Randy Williams, members of the Elon community were invited to attend the presentations of finalists for the new position which began on Monday, March 24. Husser and Williams are responsible for leading the search committee responsible for finding candidates and are working with Spelman Johnson, an executive search firm which works with higher education institutions, according to the email.

"The candidate information is confidential to ensure the success of the search process and to protect the prospective candidates and their current employment," Husser and Williams wrote in the email sent to faculty and staff.

Husser wrote in an email to Elon News Network that the finalist presentations are open to students, however the presentations are primarily intended for faculty and staff and anyone attending a presentation must agree to

keep names of finalists confidential. The three sessions with finalists presenting are on campus and began March 24.

In order to attend the presentation dates, attendees are required to fill out a Qualtrics survey included in the email, which details the confidentiality requirements set by the search committee. Attendees are prohibited from sharing candidate information, including names, winformation and any other materials "outside of Elon's community," according to the survey form.

Over the past three years, candidate searches to fill open dean positions at Elon have not required attendees to maintain confidentiality. The four dean candidate searches that took place during this period were for the Martha and Spencer Love School of Business, School of Health Sciences, College of Arts and Sciences and School of Communications.

The dean of students is responsible for supervising Student Care and Outreach, Student Conduct, the assistant dean of student success and retention, and the assistant dean of students. The assistant dean of students is responsible for university protocol related to Elon's emergency response and the on-call system, behavioral intervention, graduate student life and off-campus issues and relationships according to the email.

The new dean of students position is also intended to work closely with the Student Government Association and its advising team. Currently, Jodean Schmeiderer serves as the SGA adviser.

According to Executive President-elect

Anya Bratić, SGA members will be attending the presentations.

"Several SGA members will meet with the finalists and share their feedback with the Student Body President-elect, who serves as a member of the search committee," Bratić wrote in an email to ENN. "Their insights are highly valued and will play an influential role in the final hiring decision."

In an email to ENN, Husser said there are two student representatives who are on the search committee and everyone who attends a presentation will have access to a feedback form about the candidate.

Jana Lynn Patterson currently serves as

the dean of students and the associate vice president for Student Life, but starting June 1 will become the associate vice president and dean of student health and well-being. The new dean of students will begin in the summer.

Patterson's current position was split into two senior leadership positions: dean of students and associate vice president and dean of student health and well-being. The changes to the position came after Vice President for Student Life Jon Dooley announced at the end of 2024 the restructuring of Campus Recreation and Wellness also into two separate departments: Campus Recreation and Health Promotion.

DESIGN BY ERIN MARTIN

The search for Elon University's next Dean of Students has moved to a confidential phase. Finalist presentations will be held on campus, with attendees required to maintain confidentiality regarding candidate names.

WILL MOSS | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Senior Chandler Brayboy rushes for a big gain against Western Carolina on Sept. 14 at Rhodes Stadium. Elon lost 24-17.

FOOTBALL STARS HOPE TO PLAY IN THE NFL

6 players including Chandler Brayboy, Kevin Burkett have declared for the NFL Draft

Miles Hayford
Elon News Network

Kevin Burkett started playing football at an early age. He was in kindergarten when he first picked up the pigskin and jumped headfirst into the sport that he would fall in love with. Like other kids, his dream was to play in the National Football League and shine on the big stage. But as he got older, he realized the harsh reality of it.

"You realize how difficult of a thing that is," Burkett said. "Coaches always tell you only the top .1% of the .1% get to go, and they use that to motivate you, but you realize how stacked against you the odds are."

Elon doesn't often send players to the NFL — only 19 have ever made it, and the last one drafted was in 2019.

During his first two years at Elon as an offensive lineman, Burkett wasn't optimistic about his football future. He assumed he would play his four years of college and then move on to a regular job. However, his perspective shifted during his junior year when he played a key role in blocking for an Elon team that rushed for a total of 1,418 yards in 2023. As his performance improved, so did his confidence. Heading into his senior season, Burkett started to believe that if he played well, he might have a real chance at the next level of football.

Burkett excelled in his final year at Elon, earning first team All-CAA honors and being ranked by Pro Football Focus as the top pass protecting offensive lineman in all of FCS Football. While he approached the season like any other, he placed greater emphasis on smaller details, hoping to catch the eye of NFL scouts.

"I don't want to worry so much about me because it's a team sport, but just knowing that this is my last year of guaranteed football that I have, so just an extra level of dedication, focus, attention to detail," Burkett said. "It made me play better. It was like, 'This is what I need to go to the next level.'"

Wide receiver and kick returner Chandler Brayboy also has his sights set on the NFL. After a standout career at Elon, Brayboy capped off his final season with back-to-back 100-yard games and became one of only two players in program history to record both 1,500 career receiving yards and 1,500 career kick return yards. Nationally recognized, he earned Second Team All-American honors from the Associated Press and was named the Phil Steele FCS Special Teams Player of the Year. Brayboy hopes to get into the league and get some special teams reps but slowly work his way into a second-string receiver.

Brayboy and Burkett are among several Elon players who have declared for the NFL draft, joining quarterback Matthew Downing, wide receiver Onuma Dieke, running back Rushawn Baker and defensive back Khalil Baker. The 2025 NFL Draft takes place April 24 to 26, however players had to submit a petition declaring their intent by Jan. 15.

After completing his nursing degree in the fall, Brayboy has spent the past few months training in Fort Myers, Florida, preparing for Pro Day testing events at X3 Performance and Physical Therapy. In January, he competed in the Hula Bowl, a college football All-Star game. His focus has been on improving speed, strength and football IQ. He believes understanding the game at a deeper level is just as crucial as physical training.

"You need to really understand what the coaches want and how they see the game, and how they see the defense and how you can disguise coverages," Brayboy said. "I think that's the biggest part that I've been working on, besides the physical part of the training for the verts, the bench and the 40. I've mostly been training the brain to really master football knowledge."

Brayboy has most recently been preparing for a Pro Day exhibition. Pro Days are where players participate in drills and events to showcase their skills and athleticism in order to impress NFL teams. They include drills such as the 40-yard dash and position-specific exercises and body measurements like height and weight. For players like Brayboy who don't make the cut for the NFL Scouting Combine, a week-long showcase in February hosted by the NFL, this is one of their only chances to meet with coaches and impress scouts.

"You train for a while for one day, so you only get one opportunity," Brayboy said. "You're training for three months to just dial in one day, which is pretty cool."

Meanwhile, Burkett has been training at Elon with assistant athletics director for sports performance Nick DiMarco. In January, he traveled to Texas for the College Gridiron Showcase, a combine-style event. His training has focused on increasing strength and athleticism to improve his chances of getting noticed.

"I'm not guaranteed to be on a team next month so right now, the sole dedication is just to get a good number," Burkett said. "So how can I be the smartest? Can I be the most athletic? Can I be the fastest and the strongest, so some team takes a chance on me?"

Burkett is still connecting with scouts but has filled out questionnaires for the Dallas Cowboys and the Indianapolis Colts. Brayboy, however, has talked to scouts from 19 different NFL teams, including the Kansas City Chiefs, the Philadelphia Eagles and the Baltimore Ravens.

Burkett doesn't expect to get drafted, but hopes to get a rookie camp invite and get signed as an undrafted free agent. He dreams of joining the Tennessee Titans, allowing his family in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, close proximity to watch him play.

> **"**
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> **CHANDLER BRAYBOY**
> SENIOR FOOTBALL PLAYER

Brayboy is waiting to hear from scouts who attended his Pro Day. He estimates a 50% chance of being drafted on the final day, but believes signing as an undrafted free agent is a near certainty. In the meantime, he hopes to receive an invitation to visit an NFL team, where organizations can bring in up to 30 players to meet general managers and coaches.

Brayboy feels honored to have the opportunity to continue the legacy of Elon at the next level.
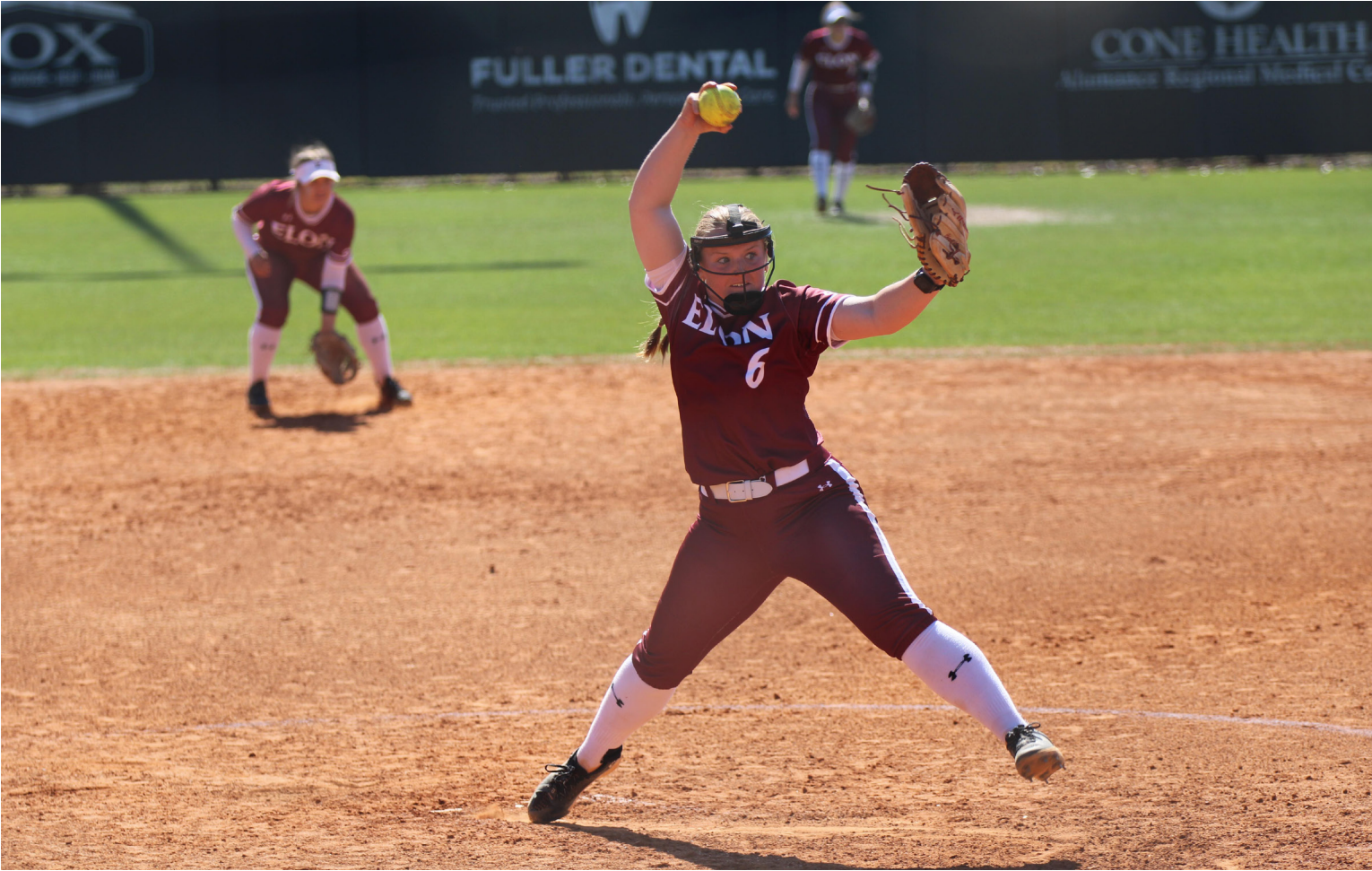
"I feel so blessed at the opportunity," Brayboy said. "How am I the guy that got lucky to be talented with football? Just being the guy with the best next chance is pretty awesome."

COURTESY OF ELON ATHLETICS

Senior Kevin Burkett playing in a game against Duke on Aug. 30, 2024.

THIS PAST WEEK IN ELON ATHLETICS

Redshirt junior Taylor Cherry pitches to the Monmouth Hawks at Hunt Softball Park on March 22. Elon won 8-3.

ANJOLINA FANTARONI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Baseball

Elon baseball went on the road to play a series against the College of Charleston and ended up losing the series. Elon started the series losing 2-12 after Charleston scored nine runs between the fifth and eighth innings. Senior Charlie Granatell got his 200th hit, the first Phoenix to do that since 2018. The team bounced back with a clutch win. It started the game with five first inning runs, but Charleston answered with five runs of its own. It was tied going into the ninth, but senior Alex Duffey got the game-winning RBI. Junior Ryan Sprock got the final three outs and a strikeout clinched the win. Elon lost the final game of the series 6-11, but

Duffey played well, hitting 3-4 with 3 RBIs.

Women's Golf

Elon women's golf finished 13th at the City of Oaks Collegiate. Freshman Emma Hansen led the team, carding a 77 in her final round and finished in 26th place among the 95 players who competed. She had two birdies on the final day of the competition. Freshman Kelly Zhao was not far behind her, placing 38th.

Men's Tennis

Elon men's tennis got a big win over University of North Carolina, Asheville despite starting by losing two out of

three doubles matches. The Phoenix bounced back with five singles wins. The team didn't drop a set in singles as junior Velijko Krstic led the way with a 6-2 6-3 victory at No. 1 singles. The sole singles loss was at No. 3 singles.

Softball

Elon got a series sweep over conference opponent Monmouth this week and only allowed five total runs. Senior McKenna McCard started the series with nine strikeouts and pitched a complete game. Redshirt junior Chloe Hatzopoulos led the way in the second game with a home run and 3 RBIs, and three other players joined her with multi-hit games. Elon finished the series

with a dominating 11-0 victory thanks to six early runs in the second inning. The Phoenix is off its best ever start in CAA play and won four straight games.

Lacrosse

Elon lacrosse is off to a 2-0 start in conference play with a win over Hofstra. Hofstra scored two early goals but never held a lead again as Elon scored four straight. Elon led 13-9 with almost seven minutes left, but Hofstra scored three straight to bring it within one. Senior Sammy Fisher clinched the win with a goal with 40 seconds left. Fisher was one of three Elon players who scored hat tricks, or scored three goals in one game.

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5 men's basketball players enter the transfer portal

According to On3, Elon is at risk of losing three of its best offensive weapons

Miles Hayford
Elon News Network

Elon men's basketball's star duo, junior TK Simpkins and sophomore TJ Simpkins, have officially entered the transfer portal, and sophomore Nick Dorn is reportedly entering the transfer portal, he told the recruiting database On3. Both redshirt sophomore Andrew King and junior Deandre Smart announced on social media on March 25 that they have also entered the transfer portal.

Entering the portal does not guarantee that they will leave Elon, but it would grant a release so that other schools are allowed to contact them about playing for other teams next season.

This is the first time they have entered the portal since joining

Elon, however the Simpkins brothers transferred from Northwest Florida State College to Elon using the transfer portal. TJ transferred last offseason and TK joined Elon after the 2022-23 season. King transferred to Elon from the University of Illinois Chicago last offseason.

If the Simpkins twins and Dorn were to leave Elon, the Phoenix would be losing a significant part of its offense. TK led the team with 16.4 points per game, Dorn was second in points per game with 15.2 and TJ was not far behind with 14.6 ppg. The three of them made up for more than half of Elon's points this season. Dorn was a threat from beyond the arc, leading the team with 74 3-pointers.

TJ and TK were also key distributors in the offense, racking up 85 and 70 assists, respectively. TJ led the team in steals with 45. TK was a major contributor to Elon's offensive gameplan down the stretch as he averaged 25.6 points per game over his final six games of

MONIKA JUREVICIUS, PAUL BARRETTO | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHERS
Junior TK Simpkins (left), sophmores TJ Simpkins (middle) and Nick Dorn (right) have entered the transfer portal along with Andrew King (not-pictured) and DeAndre Smart (not-pictured).

the season. King led the team with 111 assists and was third on the team in steals. Smart only played in six games this past season. He scored 15 points and racked up 11 rebounds in his 40 total minutes of play.

Elon, coming off a first round loss in the Coastal Athletic Association Championship, will also be losing graduating senior Sam Sherry next

season, who was a key contributor to Elon's presence in the paint.

Dorn and the Simpkins brothers did not play in Elon's postseason game in the College Basketball Invitational on March 23 where the Phoenix lost in the first round to Army West Point.

Elon Athletics did not respond to Elon News Network's immediate request for comment.

Elon Scoreboard

Baseball

March 21 - Elon 2 College of Charleston 12

March 22 - Elon 14 College of Charleston 13

March 23 - Elon 6 College of Charleston 11

Women's Golf

March 21-22 - 13th at the City of Oaks Collegiate

Men's Tennis

March 21 - Elon 5 UNC Asheville 2

Softball

March 21- Elon 7 Monmouth 2

March 22- Elon 8 Monmouth 3

March 23- Elon 11 Monmouth 0

Lacrosse

March 23- Elon 14 Hofstra 12

Upcoming

Women's Tennis

March 29 - Elon (11-5) vs. East Carolina (4-8) 1 p.m.

Men's Tennis

March 30 - Elon (5-6) vs. William & Mary (3-8) noon

Baseball

March 28 - Elon (9-14) vs. Delaware (12-9) 6 p.m.

March 29 - Elon (9-14) vs. Delaware (12-9) 4 p.m.

March 30 - Elon (9-14) vs. Delaware (12-9) 1 p.m.

Softball

March 28 - Elon (15-12) at Delaware (17-10) 5 p.m.

March 29 - Elon (15-12) at Delaware (17-10) 3 p.m.

March 30 - Elon (15-12) at Delaware (17-10) 1 p.m.

Lacrosse

March 29 - Elon (5-4) vs. Campbell (3-7) 1 p.m.

Men's Golf

March 31 - April 1 - Maridoe Invitational at University of North Texas

Women's Golf

March 31 - April 1 - Ironwood Invitational at East Carolina University

Track & Field

March 27-29 - Raleigh Relays at North Carolina State University