

Alamance County receives 3M grant for drinking water

Town aims to lower concentrations of PFAS found at plants

Alice Morrissey
Elon News Network

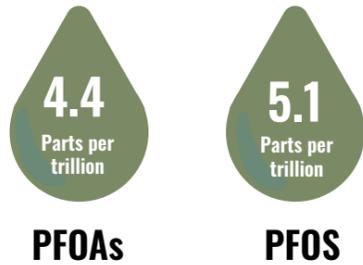
Graham and Burlington received \$3 million each from the state's Drinking Water Reserve Loan Fund to update two water treatment facilities in Alamance County. Upgrading drinking water treatments in Burlington and adding renovations to the Graham-Mebane Water Treatment Plant.

According to a statement Gov. Josh Stein made in a press release Feb. 19, 145 projects in 66 counties across the state will receive more than \$472 million in funding for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. The press release said the funds are allocated to counties that applied to help support the quality and safety of water infrastructure across the state, a need highlighted by the devastation of Hurricane Helene.

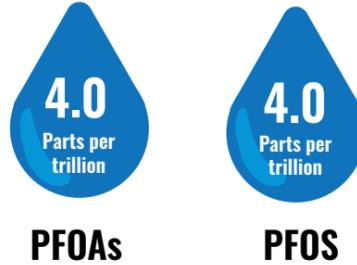
"The awards will help cities, towns and counties strengthen infrastructure to better withstand future storms, improve

Graham and Mebane Water Contamination

Levels as of August 2024



Acceptable levels



GRAPHIC BY MEGAN WALSH

existing drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, reduce contamination by chemicals, and identify and replace lead pipes," Stein said in the press release.

Graham Assistant City Manager Aaron Holland said the city is still in the early design phase and does not yet have specifics on what will be addressed by the funds. He said the upgrades will help the water treatment center filter and treat chemicals such as Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS. PFAS are man-made chemicals used since the 1940s in everyday items such as nonstick pans, waterproof

clothing and food wrappers. They are often called "forever chemicals" because they do not easily break down and have been linked to health issues.

In August 2024, the most recent sampling showed two types of PFAS in distribution water — the treated water supplied to customers — with PFOA at about 4.4 parts per trillion and PFOS at about 5.1 parts per trillion. According to the NC department of Environmental Quality, the maximum contaminant level for drinking water is 4.0 parts per trillion for PFOA and PFOS.

Holland said the grant helps ease the financial burden on the county.

"Anything that's out there and that's available, we're going after every dime because it's going to help reduce the cost that we're going to be holding," Holland said.

He said he predicts the renovations to the water plant will total about \$30 million. He said applying for funding allows the city to keep water rates lower when undertaking large-scale projects.

"That's the impact to the community, obviously, the more that we can get grants to cover, the less that we will have to go up on rates to cover those expenses," Holland said.

Graham Mayor Chelsea Dickey said securing projects like this helps move the city forward. "I think it just reinforces the trajectory that we're headed in," Dickey said. "These grants, they almost put us on the map or validate that we are receiving this kind of attention, whether that's coming from developers or getting other grants."

She said the city will continue seeking grants and other resources to support infrastructure development serving communities across Alamance County.

Food Lion plans renovations for 3 Burlington stores

City of Burlington continues to develop partnership

Alice Morrissey
Elon News Network

Food Lion and the city of Burlington are continuing to build their relationship with three Food Lion locations scheduled to undergo renovations this year.

The company has strong North Carolina ties. It was founded in Salisbury, North Carolina, only about an hour drive from Burlington, and has over 500 locations across the state. Earlier this year, Burlington announced it would be the new location for a new Food Lion distribution plant, marking the biggest economic investment in Burlington's history. The food distribution plant is around an \$860 million investment and is estimated to bring 500 new jobs to the area. Food Lion's investment into Burlington expands with upgrade projects scheduled for three locations throughout the city.

The City of Burlington approved three commercial renovation permits for Food Lion stores in January 2026. The South Church Street location lists about \$9,100 in fees and names Farris Interior Installation Inc. as the contractor. The store at 1780 W. Webb Ave. lists a similar fee and is contracted with STH & Associates Inc.

The third location on Ramada Road totals about \$10,433 in fees and is also contracted by Farris Interior Installation Inc. The building permit fee for that location is slightly higher, reflecting a larger estimated renovation cost due to the size and scope of the project.

Vaughn Shaffer, senior project manager for Alliance Architecture of the Triad, an architecture firm located in Winston-Salem, filed the application for the South Church Street location. Shaffer said he has designed and filed about 140 permits for Food Lion stores over the past 11 years. He said the projects focus primarily on interior renovations and updates while maintaining the company's consistent store design.

"They try to keep a consistency about the stores," Shaffer said. "It's kind of like going to McDonald's. You want the McDonald's in Burlington to look the same as the



KATHAN GANDHI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Food Lion on South Church Street is one of the three Burlington locations set for renovations.

McDonald's in Randleman."

Burlington Economic Development Director Adam Shull said the store renovations reflect that expanding partnership.

"That relationship is one we're building on in a huge way, and we view it as our opportunity to be a great local partner so that they thrive for years to come," Shull said.

Shull said Food Lion's investment in Burlington could help lay the groundwork for future development in the area. He said the partnership also demonstrates the city's ability to support large projects. Burlington is a steadily growing area with the population growing about 9% since the 2020 census. Annually the population in the area increases by an average of 1.53%, with the median household income also rising 2.15%.

"This is going to help all parts of Burlington, the entire community, and Alamance County and Guilford County for that matter," Shull said. "I just want to highlight that I think it's something worth celebrating and worth being proud of."

According to the permits, construction is expected to be completed by spring 2027, with the Ramada Road location scheduled to finish this summer.

Food Lion did not respond to Elon News Network's request for comment.

Local youth program helps teens explore filmmaking, acting



ANJOLINA FANTARONI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

London Sibley, right, rehearses a scene from "Trivial Trivia: Ex's Edition" at Thataways Youth Center on March 2.

Burlington video, theater production group for ages 13-19 meets weekly

Anjolina Fantaroni
Elon News Network

Teen 2 Teen Video & Theatre, an Alamance County production group, is giving teenagers a chance to showcase their creativity, with help from a Queens University of Charlotte alum. The university is currently undergoing a planned merger with Elon University.

Katie Farrell, who graduated from Queens in 2019, said she was searching for a job when she found an opening at Thataways Youth Center that closely matched her major, a Bachelor of Arts in multimedia storytelling. She first worked for Teen 2 Teen's summer film lab.

The lab is a weeklong workshop where students learn skills such as scriptwriting, casting, directing, acting and videography. This year's lab will take place the week of

July 20 at Impact Alamance in downtown Burlington. It costs \$90 for the week.

This week, Teen 2 Teen is filming a video titled, "Trivial Trivia: Ex's Edition" — a spinoff of the game show, Family Feud. With her position at the youth center, Farrell films, positions and helps clean up the scripts the teenagers have written. She said her favorite part is interacting with the students.

"Being a teenager is hard," Farrell said. "Middle school was hard, high school was hard, and I enjoy seeing them grow and watching their confidence grow."

London Sibley, a seventh grader at Hawfields Middle School, is playing Cleve Marley, a spinoff of "Family Feud" host Steve Harvey, in the latest film. She said she likes the group because of the opportunity to engage with theater and switch from character to character.

See TEEN 2 TEEN | pg. 6



Alamance County celebrates US history
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Graduate basketball player thrives at Elon
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Elon University's new professor title begins following promotions

52 professors were promoted or tenured, 19 granted continuance

Megan Walsh

Elon News Network

With this year's tenure and promotions announcement came a title shift for Elon professors formerly known as lecturers, now called teaching professors.

The title change provides these professors a chance to have the more upward mobility of multiple promotion levels that tenured professors have. Lecturers previously could only be promoted to senior lecturer. Beyond the shift, the announcement included promotions for 52 professors and continuance for 19.

Tenure — an advancement that increases job security — or promotion is a different process depending on the type of professor. Tenure-track professors are those who participate in research in addition to teaching students. Teaching professors don't go up for tenure as they do not have a research requirement, but have to teach more classes each year.

For all professors, the process for promotion starts with putting together a digital portfolio. This document includes self evaluations, the feedback surveys students are asked to fill out at the end of the semester and other documents to show the school the professor's commitment to three categories: teaching, service to the university and scholarship.

Professor of math and statistics Heather Barker was granted tenure and promoted to associate professor. She went up for tenure and promotion after 6 years of working at Elon. She said the process is nerve wracking because if tenure track professors do not get the promotion they are asked to leave the

university.

"Once you get to that promotion level, it's almost like you can take a step back and breathe, like, 'Ok, I did it. I did all the things. I checked all the boxes. Now maybe I can take a little bit more risk with my research. Maybe I can try different things in the classroom,'" Barker said.

Barker said that in academics there is always another goal to hit from getting a bachelor's degree to getting a master's followed by a doctorate degree and she is relieved to have hit the one of the last major hurdles of the career.

With all the stress of the process, Barker said the professors going up for tenure also are able to find a community in working on their applications together, but that they aren't the only ones that deserve recognition.

"Those of us that went through it together, like this summer, we had a big writing group that met once a week to just put our heads together and push each other forward," Barker said. "Like my office neighbor here, he and I went up together at the same time. But I think when we vent about the process and how hard it is, sometimes we forget about the people that are reviewing us."

Professor of Spanish Mina Garcia served on the promotion and tenure committee from 2023 to 2025 and was committee chair for the 2024-25 academic year. Garcia said she enjoyed the experience of being on the committee, even with the intense work.

Garcia explained that each year after the promotion portfolios are turned in, the committee and individual department chairs review the portfolios. The committee and chairs meet to discuss their recommendations, before sending them to the provost's office for final approval.

Garcia — a tenured professor herself — said having been on both sides of the process, she wants other professors to understand that the committee looks at each application

individually and carefully.

"Every file is read entirely by everybody, and every file is discussed at length," Garcia said.

Professor of management Scott Oakes '90 was granted continuance on the new teaching professor track. He said continuance, or being granted the chance to continue working toward the next promotion level, on the teaching professor track comes during a professor's fourth year as a full-time faculty member.

Oakes said he was pleased to see the university provide staff members that were hired as lecturers the opportunity to move up in the university through the same levels as the tenure-track faculty.

"There were a lot of senior lecturers who had been at Elon for quite some time who also were promoted to, I guess you would say full teaching professor, because it really didn't have any other track, any other forward movement to do," Oakes said. "So that was a big deal for them."

Barker said the campus would not run without teaching professors and the new position shift provides them a more equal playing field.

"There's a lot of people that have been on campus for a long time that have been pushing for this, and they're finally celebrated," Barker said.

All promotions come with a raise to professors' salaries, a chance to take a full sabbatical within the first two years of the promotion, and three course releases over the next four years that provide the professor the opportunity to teach fewer classes and focus on other aspects of their job on campus, such as furthering their research.

According to the 2024-25 Elon Faculty Handbook, tenure-track professors see a \$5,000 dollar raise when promoted to associate professor and a \$9,000 raise when promoted to full professor.

Tenure Track



Teaching Professor Track



GRAPHIC BY MEGAN WALSH

Applications open for Roberts Academy

Students must be diagnosed with dyslexia to be eligible

Fiona McAllister

Elon News Network

Roberts Academy at Elon University, the school for students with dyslexia, has opened its application process. Roberts Academy will open on Elon's campus next fall, initially serving students in grades three and four. The school will temporarily be located in the Trollinger House, which previously housed the I-House Living-Learning Community.

This four-step application process begins with a prospective student form. This form asks for general information about the student and their family, and also asks about the child's diagnosis and most recent comprehensive psychological/educational or neuro-psychological evaluation by a professional.

Dean of the Dr. Jo Watts Williams School of Education, Ann Bullock, said that this form is a way to see if the child is diagnosed with dyslexia. Bullock said that students must be diagnosed in order to apply for Roberts Academy at Elon.

"Just a very short, quick form," Bullock said. "We want to do that so we can build a relationship with the family."

Bullock said that multiple parents have already filled out this form, and that there are people at various stages throughout the process. She said that there have been



Students helping with the announcement of Roberts Academy talk with donor Marjorie Roberts on Nov. 6, 2025.

MEGAN WALSH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

around 80 inquiries about the application process.

If the prospective student form is approved, the student is invited to submit a formal application. After the application is approved, the student and their family are invited for an interview and screening. Bullock said that when looking for prospective students, there is a criteria the student has to meet.

"They have to be in third or fourth grade, and they have to have a primary

diagnosis of dyslexia," Bullock said. "They have to be a child that can learn best using a multisensory approach, which are gonna be most children."

Classes start in August, but applications will only close once the classes are full. There will be 24 students in total: 12 third graders and 12 fourth graders, according to Bullock.

Annual tuition at Roberts Academy is \$20,500. Bullock said that students can apply for state scholarships, along with financial aid.

CORRECTIONS

In the story "Women's tennis team looks to defend their title after historic 2025 season" from the March 4 edition of The Pendulum, Elon's women's tennis team standings were incorrectly noted. The correct statistic is that the women's tennis team was 6-2 in the season as of March 4.

Elon News Network regrets this error.

Revolutionary War reenactors commemorate Alamance history



CHARLOTTE PFABE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Revolutionary War reenactors participated in a musket demonstration at Alamance Battleground Historical Site in Burlington on March 7. The event kicked off Alamance County's celebrations for the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Alamance Battleground celebrates 250 years of independence

Charlotte Pfabe
Elon News Network

Wearing his long red coat with black and white detailing, David Snyder loaded his weapon, aimed at his target and waited to hear the signal. Behind him, a crowd of people watched as he lined up his shot. Standing next to other redcoats, he fired his musket, the shot echoing through the wooded area. He's used to this. He's been a American Revolutionary War reenactor for over 50 years.

"As long as I'm physically capable of doing it, I will keep on doing it," Snyder said.

Along North Carolina Highway 62 in Burlington, there's a place where history was made. It's the Alamance Battleground State Historic Site. This is where Snyder and other volunteers kicked off Alamance County's celebrations to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

According to site manager Nathan Schultz, assistance from America 250 NC, a state initiative focused on commemorating America's 250th anniversary, funded part of the event. Schultz said the Alamance Battleground Friends and the Alamance County Visitors Bureau also helped the site apply for other grants too, which allowed them to pay some of the participants. However, many came to the celebration March 7 simply because they enjoy sharing history.

The battleground is set to commemorate the Battle of Alamance, when an armed group of farmers called

the Regulators battled with a British militia on May 16, 1771.

"Everybody else here as volunteers, came out of their own free will to help and throw this event today," Schultz said.

Being a reenactor transports Snyder into a different world. He often portrays a private of the British Army's 64th regiment. History, he said, is often told by the victors, so he chose to portray a member of the losing army.

"It was a way of learning the history by actually getting into the skin of someone else who'd been there and portraying

that," Snyder said.

Gathered in red, white and blue, attendees took a step back in time, remembering the history of where they stood. The history is close to Christina Munter, whose family dates back to the 13 colonies. Munter is the regent, or leader, of the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, which had a table at the event. The DAR is a volunteer women's service organization focusing on historical preservation.

"It's fun to connect the history and the events that happened at that time

and learn about the family connection," Munter said.

The event allowed people to connect with history but also reflect on how the nation has changed since the 1700s.

"It gives us a good check mark. It's a reminder both of how far we've come," Schultz said. "250 years, when they created independence, there was a lot of stuff left undone. And we have this moment now, 250 years later, to reflect on both what has been done to expand those fundamental ideas people have stretched and even to realize what is left to be done."

For Snyder, the 250th wasn't his first time living through a milestone year. He also participated in 200th and 225th anniversary events, still as a British soldier. He said he wasn't sure if people would continue to be reenacting today.

"I was afraid that maybe with that last reenactment there at the end of the war, that this was all going to go away," Snyder said. "I'm happy to say it has not. We've kept on doing it."

The battleground also bridged generational gaps, passing along old memories to new visitors. Alamance County resident Molly Hubbard and her husband brought their two children to the battleground, a place she visited throughout her own childhood.

"I grew up here, so I've been here quite a bit, for field trips and things like that," Hubbard said. "But I haven't been able to bring the kids out yet, and this has been pretty fun."

Alamance is one of the 88 counties in North Carolina that formed committees for America 250 NC. This means the county will help lead events marking the anniversary, such as the one at Alamance Battleground State Historic Site.



CHARLOTTE PFABE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Three members from the Guilford Courthouse Fire and Drum Corps play revolutionary war-era music during 250th anniversary commemorative event at Alamance Battleground on March 7.



ABIGAIL HINES | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Senior Laila Anderson contests a Seahawk's drive in Elon's March 7 home game against University of North Carolina, Wilmington. The Elon Phoenix women's basketball team closed its regular season with a 66-54 senior day win over the Seahawks. Elon women's basketball head coach Charlotte Smith said the early execution matched the team's game plan. "We were rolling in the first half," Smith said. "Our defense was really good, and we were operating within the game plan of getting the ball inside."



ABIGAIL HINES | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon University graduate student guard Ja'Juan Carr dribbles the ball while being guarded by University of North Carolina, Wilmington, senior guard Nolan Hodge during a home game March 3 where Elon lost to Wilmington 76-57.



KATRINA HOLTZ | PHOTO EDITOR

Comedian and former "Saturday Night Live" cast member Leslie Jones performs for the Student Union Board's annual Elon Day spring comedy show in Alumni Gym on March 5. Elon Day is a philanthropic event hosted by Elon University to raise money for the initiatives they support and run. This year, the university raised \$3,583,005 on Elon Day, according to a Today at Elon article.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Elon University junior catcher/utility player Peyton Fitzpatrick behind home plate while North Carolina A&T sophomore catcher Tyra Robinson is at bat. Elon won the March 7 match 3-2 at Hunt Softball Park.



CHARLOTTE PFABE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Alamance Battleground filled with Revolutionary-War era music March 7 as the historical site commemorated a skirmish, or small battle, between the British Army and colonists. Learn more on page 3.



MIA TORRES | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Elon Wind Ensemble performs at its preview concert before leaving for Carnegie Hall on Sunday.

WHEN SHE WAS IN 5th grade, Elon junior Chloe Hyatt was required to play an instrument. She chose the clarinet. Ten years later, she's playing at Carnegie Hall with Elon's Wind Ensemble.

The ensemble gave community members a preview of its performance happening March 11 at Carnegie Hall, during a concert on campus March 4, offering audiences a first look at the music the group will perform in New York.

The Wind Ensemble is a contemporary group focused on performing at the highest level possible. The concert consisted of 5 songs, just over 50 students and over 15 instruments. The show was about an hour long.

Jonathan Poquette, director of bands, said the concert is a way to give back to the community.

"Having community members both on and off campus just coming to our concerts and giving us love as we were growing has meant a tremendous amount to both me and the students," Poquette said.

Carnegie Hall is a 135-year-old music venue in New York City. It's a designated national historic landmark and has featured musicians ranging from Tchaikovsky to the Beatles.

Poquette himself once performed at the historic venue as a college student through an organization called World Projects, where applicants submitted audition recordings that demonstrated their abilities before being selected.

The ensemble was invited to one of two

showcase ensembles for the 24th Annual New York Wind Band Festival. He found out in June 2024 that the ensemble had been chosen, but it wasn't until the end of the year that it was confirmed they'd go.

Hyatt said nobody knew Poquette had submitted the ensemble to perform and when the ensemble was told everyone thought it was an insane opportunity.

Hyatt said she thinks she'll feel the nerves when she steps onto the stage at Carnegie Hall. However, she said eventually it will feel like any other performance.

"It feels the same as any concert where you'd like, you step on stage, you feel a little nervous, and then you're like, you sit down and it feels so familiar because like, we practiced it so much," Hyatt said.

Freshman Ian Wong plays the flute in the ensemble. He said he is shocked, yet thrilled, to get the opportunity.

Wong started playing music in middle school and chose band as an elective. While music is not his major he decided to continue to pursue it in college.

"I didn't expect to perform on stage like this or go places like this as an organization," Wong said. "This is like a once in a lifetime opportunity, I'll probably never get to perform on the stage like this again."

The band will make a stop at a high school in Delaware on its way to New York. When the ensemble gets there, it will also perform at a high school in Staten Island.

Poquette said the opportunity to perform the music more than once is reassuring because the students can get comfortable in different venues, as most of them have

never played outside of Elon or their high schools.

"We can hear and see how we're going to kind of navigate some of these waters, even if the space is different," Poquette said.

Wong said their last concert was in December, so the preview concert and the stops on the way to New York are a good warmup for Carnegie Hall.

"Being able to have multiple attempts to check things like sound, balance, tuning, just little things like that, every single run that you get really helps you refine and make a better product," Wong said.

Poquette said to prepare for the trip, the ensemble has been polishing the music rather than learning new pieces. He emphasized that the students are the ones doing the work.

"I'm trying to put as much ownership on the students and give them the space to hold each other a little more accountable than just coming from me," Poquette said.

Wong said it's difficult knowing an important performance is coming up and wanting to meet the expectations.

"I do think, though, that with the expectations of performing at Carnegie, that the band has been a little bit more locked in and more focused," Wong said.

Hyatt said the students in the Wind Ensemble are well prepared, and their training hasn't really changed — except they might be taking it more seriously.

"We're really locking it in during sections and trying to lock in in class and make sure, like, we're really getting down," Hyatt said.

Music professor Todd Coleman

composed one of the songs that his students will play in New York. He has had major performances of his work before — including with the Minnesota Orchestra and the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. However, his work has never been played in Carnegie Hall.

Coleman said the first time he composed music was when he was 16. It was played by his high school orchestra, which inspired him to be a composer.

"This trip and hearing it played in that venue is, to me, it's like another version of that experience," Coleman said.

Coleman explained the experience as the birth of something new and doing it with his students and colleagues is even more wonderful.

Cathy Seagroves attended the preview performance and said it was her first time witnessing the Elon Wind Ensemble.

Seagroves attends the program Life at Elon which provides learning opportunities for people over the age of 50. She decided to attend the preview concert after learning about it through the program.

"It's such unusual music that it just showcased each and every performer, each and every instrument," Seagroves said.

Ashley Morales, a senior tuba player in the ensemble, said when she initially joined the band it was small that some students had to switch instruments because they didn't have enough parts.

"Going from there to playing on one of the biggest stages in the world, it's like a good feeling because in some way you feel like you help get us there," Morales said.

Hollywood producer mentors teen filmmakers

TEEN 2 TEEN | from cover

"That's what I find the most fun about it," Sibley said. "You can really just get into imagination, really just do whatever you want."

Sibley said she loves the films and community the group has brought her.

"They really just bring me joy, like the people and the place," Sibley said. "It just makes me so happy. This is one of my favorite parts of the week."

Teen 2 Teen meets every Monday night at 7 p.m. at Thataways Youth Center in Burlington.

Farrell starts before students arrive, setting up the camera and backdrop if the group is filming.

"If we're just brainstorming, then it's just a matter of setting up tables and getting enough chairs for everyone, and we get everyone signed in at the beginning, and then we just jump right in and get started," Farrell said.

The group's director, Robert Kearns, spent 20 years in Los Angeles working on projects such as The Steve Harvey Show, Blue Velvet, Pet Sematary and Good Sports.

Kearns has been involved with Teen 2 Teen

for 13 years. Originally, the group produced videos about issues facing youth, such as dating violence and teen alcohol abuse. The program is funded by the City of Burlington Recreation & Parks department, but Kearns said the budget is small.

"We're in the process of getting a new laptop, because our previous laptop is gone kaput, and we're getting a new Dell with a new Adobe Premiere Pro," Kearns said. "We're catching up because we were using Final Cut Pro on the Macintosh."

Kearns said the group shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic. Afterward, it reformed and began creating more lighthearted videos.

"The kids started writing their own fictional scripts," Kearns said. "Tonight, we're doing a little takeoff on Family Feud."

Students will spend three or four more Monday nights completing the filming process, and the final pieces are published on their Facebook and YouTube pages. Kearns said he loves seeing the growth of the students, especially those who used to refuse being on camera.

"Two years later, I can't keep them off camera, so it's good to see them come out of their shell," Kearns said.



ANJOLINA FANTARONI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

London Sibley, who plays Cleve Marley in "Trivial Trivia: Ex's Edition," rehearses a scene at Thataways Youth Center March 2.

"IT JUST MAKES ME SO HAPPY.
THIS IS ONE OF MY FAVORITE PARTS OF THE WEEK."

LONDON SIBLEY
TEEN 2 TEEN PARTICIPANT

Elon's choice of infamous consulting groups challenge the morality of its education

University's ties include Boston Consulting Group, who provided modelling for postwar 'Gaza Riviera' project



Alex Nettles
Columnist

The haste of Elon Day's fundraising is over. Now is an important time to reexamine what it means to be a university using our financial ties. It seems we haven't talked about the consulting half of the picture.

The Elon-Queens merger also brought Elon University to consult with ethically dubious consulting firms, including the consulting firm that did infamous financial mapping used in a proposal to turn the bombed-out Gaza strip into a resort. Elon's tax filings show multiple meetings with another firm that specializes in using student demographic data for "tuition leveraging."

Direct ties to this sort of thinking poses questions for Elon's calling as a university. Elon's website claims the teaching "prepares graduates to be creative, resilient, ambitious and ethical citizens of our global culture."

How can we claim the imagery of respecting humanity while doing business with those who don't? There is a widening gap between image and reality. With each Elon Day, there is a sweat-stained man panting in a bathroom taking off a Phoenix full face mask. With each strange deal Elon makes with a dubious consulting firm, the goal of college steps closer to being a slogan.

Elon's choice of problematic consulting groups for the Queens merger

Elon employed Boston Consulting Group to oversee the merger of the two universities, according to a statement by Elon. Boston Consulting Group is a major player in consulting. Consultants financially modeled the reconstruction of Gaza into a resort-like setting, according to The Financial Times. This specific branch of the group even offered "relocation packages" that gave \$9,000 per Gaza resident. Boston Consulting Group said those employees were in a

rogue branch in a public relations memo. Boston Consulting Group provided their financial modeling to The Tony Blair Group, who fashioned a "Gaza Riviera" project with a "Trump Riviera" and "Elon Musk Smart Manufacturing Zone," according to The Financial Times.

This is known in the consulting world, but the Elon-Queens merger gains another layer of territorial irony for students. For big consulting firms

Boston Consulting Group, a successful business model involves branches acquiring clients at a rapid rate.

It still doesn't seem like a good idea for Elon's consulting firm to work with an aid foundation that Doctors Without Borders describes as "slaughter masked as aid" because of the number of killings.

This is not a thread on X. It doesn't matter what side of the spectrum you are on, or how you feel about Gaza. It seems unwise for a university to take direct advice from a company whose business culture leads to war opportunism.

Boston Consulting Group helps with the financial modelling of authoritarian regimes of Saudi Arabia, according to The New York Times. Boston Consulting Group also profited off of the corrupt business practices of Isabel Dos Santos, daughter of Angola's authoritarian leader, for years, according to The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists.

Elon employed Huron Consulting Group for the due diligence of the merger. They are known for their massive layoffs in the colleges they consult with and breakneck efficiency. One report drew inspiration from the dispossession of Hurricane Katrina victims and applied it to education solutions during COVID-19, according to The Eagle.

Consulting with firms specializing in tuition pricing

Elon University consulted with Ruffalo Noel Levitz, a firm that specializes in "tuition leveraging" on multiple occasions, according to Elon's non-profit filings in the fiscal endings of 2022 and 2023. These firms leverage mass amounts of student data to find families' ability and willingness to pay in order to tuition efficiency.

Ruffalo Noel Levitz uses wide sets of sociological data to calculate the perfect amount of aid, need based or otherwise. These initial calculations are offered as bid to families, according to The New York Times.

Perhaps incidentally, Elon has been slow to update some scholarships despite tuition rising with inflation every year. College Fellows didn't get a raise to their tuition until recently. Elon raised other scholarships, but the College Fellows scholarship has been the same \$7,500 over the last four years. It wasn't until this academic year that Elon raised the amount to \$8,000. Now the students can afford five more \$100 parking tickets.

If a student is a junior and a College Fellow now, they will have lost \$6,832 across their college career because of unpredicted tuition raises. If they are a senior, the amount hovers around a similar \$6,482. That is close to the annual scholarship amount.

As we look up and see the start of our adulthood, it is hard to see the goalpost stay still. Like wild and endless grass, it continues widening, continues to spill distant. We now see the nervous world, the cautious world, and every kind of inflation — the food at McEwen Dining Hall is really good though.

Elon is a business-savvy school with a beautiful campus. That is why we exist. Consulting is an important way to gain guidance through uncertainty. Concepts like tuition leveraging have their place. How long will we consult with these groups and wield the total imagery of a liberal arts university?

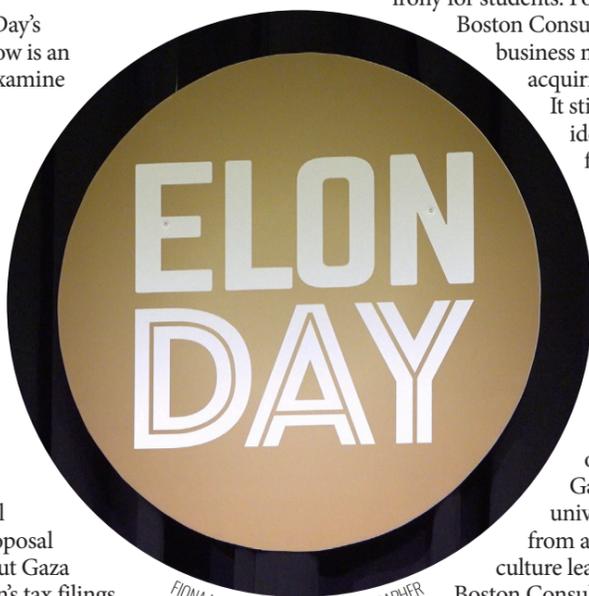
A university's goals are informed with how it gets its advice. There is a classical picture of education that I sometimes hear older professors hearken back to. One of my professors referred to Elon University as the "Garden of Eden." Maybe education has become a victim of the cynicism of our age, where every comfortable value seems unmasked by events on the edges of the world.

When you minimize the moral goal of education you become like the nearby High Point University. They barely use liberal arts language to cover up their goal. High Point is an example of a university that runs like a business on every level. In a way, it is honest.

I remember touring the campus during the last days of COVID-19 pandemic. I completed a tour by golf cart as I saw the purple-doused networking steakhouses and the fake airplane seating that simulates answering work emails.

My tour guide ushered me into a room into a meeting room. It is where they close the deal and make the kill, a more one-on-one method learned from sales. The saleswoman-type has an entrepreneurial distance in her face as she passed out High Point University literature and spoke to me. The pamphlets encouraged vague life skills and business leadership. I took the pamphlets politely and stumbled into the sun.

Gates and fences surround the university and confine its fountains and strange statues from town. I already made up my mind to throw away my pamphlets before I got to the car. I wonder how many kids have been Elon and done the same. They are wrong now, but maybe in 10 years they won't be.



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Elon Day, this year March 5, is an annual fundraising initiative hosted by Elon University.

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Basketball player's unlikely rise follows historic scoring leap

Unknown talent recognized after statistically rare season at Elon

Kathan Gandhi
Elon News Network

Getting to the free-throw line is a major part of graduate forward Chandler Cuthrell's game. He has attempted the 10th most free throws per game of any player in Division I men's basketball this season, per ESPN. He was shooting 69% from the free-throw line through his first 27 games.

In his final four appearances, he only missed two.

As Cuthrell sank 11 of his 12 free throws at the Schar Center on March 2, he ended his only regular season with Elon men's basketball on an emphatic, somber note.

Cuthrell — an energetic, lanky scorer who refuses to be denied at the rim — couldn't miss from the penalty line. It's an issue he'd been struggling with all season.

Cuthrell said the biggest change he made was taking his time. Early on, he was rushing each attempt. He had to make sure to breathe.

"So it's just about relaxing and saving my time on the free-throw line," Cuthrell said.

Patience, it turns out, has been a theme of his career.

Cuthrell's path to Elon wasn't direct. He spent two seasons at Odessa College in Texas before transferring to the University of Texas, San Antonio. After a year with the Roadrunners, he moved again. This time at Purdue University, Fort Wayne, where he was primarily used off the bench for his rebounding.

When Cuthrell transferred to Elon ahead of the 2025-26 season, hardly anyone saw an offensive explosion coming. But head coach Billy Taylor said he envisioned something different.

"What we saw on the film is exactly what he's doing now," Taylor said. "We knew he could get to the free-throw line and play with a really high level of efficiency."

Cuthrell, who grew up in Greensboro, North Carolina, returned to the Triad as part of Elon's eight-player transfer class. He would soon become the face of it.

The graduate student exploded onto the scene in Elon's first game of the season — scoring 21 points and grabbing 5 rebounds. It was a statline that foreshadowed his season standards.

Cuthrell averaged 20 points and 6.5 rebounds per-game in his sole year with Elon. He finished as the 33rd-best scorer in the country, according to ESPN. Taylor said he's been the backbone of the team.

"What Chandler has done? I mean, it's been a historic season," Taylor said. "To elevate to 20 points per game in this league, it's phenomenal. I'm so proud of him."

On top of the jaw-dropping dunks, flashy post moves and knack for drawing fouls — what made Cuthrell's season one to remember is his statistically unlikely jump in scoring.

Elon's top-scorer averaged 6.1 points-per-game in his first four years of college, making his leap with the Phoenix a 13.9-point change.

According to ESPN data, only two Division I players have increased their scoring average by more in a single season. Cuthrell's year as a Phoenix, win-or-lose,



Graduate forward Chandler Cuthrell takes a breath before attempting a free-throw against the University of North Carolina, Wilmington, March 2 at Schar Center. Cuthrell went 11-12 from the free-throw line in Elon's 76-57 loss.

ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

was a statistical anomaly.

When asked about the historic jump, Cuthrell pointed to sophomore teammate and fellow transfer, Bryson Cokley.

"This is the first time that somebody has believed at the level this staff does," Cokley said. "It does a lot to your confidence, being able to go out there and play your game, and having the coaches' trust."

As Cokley spoke, Cuthrell nodded along, smiling at the notion of having a

staff that believes in them.

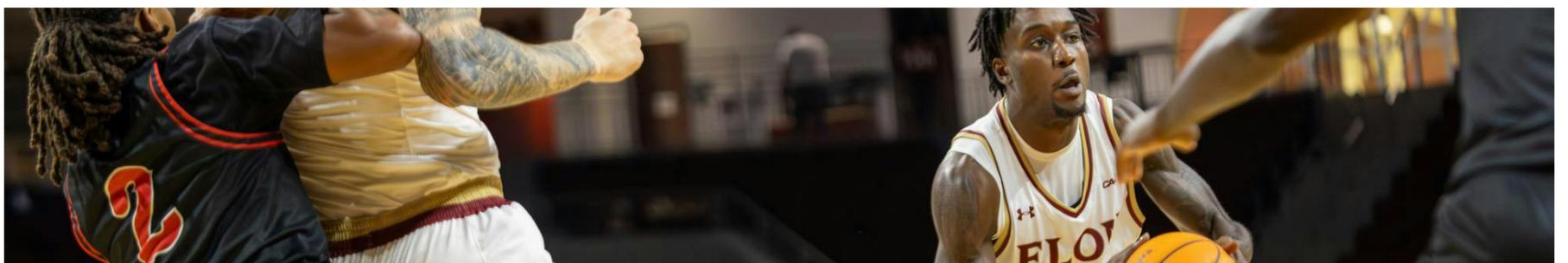
Whether fans and staff foresaw Cuthrell's offensive leap, the Coastal Athletic Association now recognizes it. The conference named Cuthrell to the CAA second team on Mar. 6, marking a career accomplishment on the graduate student's long journey.

Although the Phoenix lost 76-57 to the University of North Carolina, Wilmington, on senior night, Cuthrell said it's been an

amazing year.

"It's sad that, obviously, my last game in the Schar Center was ended like this," Cuthrell said. "But it's definitely been such a blessing. I love playing here."

After stops at three different programs, Cuthrell needed just one season at Elon to show what he could become. For Taylor and the Phoenix, that belief turned into one of the most unlikely breakout seasons in the country.



Graduate Chandler Cuthrell dribbles the ball as he tries to get in the paint on Nov. 5 in a game against Belmont Abbey College. Cuthrell scored 21 points in the 99-51 win over Belmont Abbey,

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