

Fire code violations strain university, town relations



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
The coat of an Elon Fire Department member hanging from the handle of Engine 8.

Dispute over fire inspections lead to budget cuts

Elissa Leka
Elon News Network

The town of Elon and Elon university are mending relationships and working on more effective communication following a dispute that prompted Elon University to halt all payments to the town. The rollout of a new fire inspection process revealed code violations, which the university had not addressed.

One of these violations, written in citation by town of Elon fire marshal Brian Graves,

stated that in January 2025, Elon University had “assured” Graves that the carbon monoxide monitors would be installed in Danieley dorms A, B, C and D. The town conducted a follow-up later in June, which revealed the university had not complied.

The follow up said there were “missing carbon monoxide alarms in required locations.” According to the report, some of the installed alarms were reported “defective or inoperable,” with some containing batteries that had been dead since 2023, and others that had corroded parts in batteries and terminals.

The citation described this as “willful neglect by the university to maintain critical life safety systems as required.”
Patrick Noltemeyer, Elon University’s

chief of staff to the board of trustees, said the decision to halt payments came as the university was adjusting to the shift in oversight and the new procedures. When Brian Graves was appointed fire marshal of the Town of Elon in 2024, fire inspection responsibilities for Elon University and businesses transferred from Alamance County to the town of Elon as a part of the town’s initiative to hire fire inspectors. The county had previously done the inspections at no cost. Now, the cost ranges from \$75 to \$1,000 dollars, according to the town of Elon fiscal year 2025-26 fee schedule.

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NC faces degree shortfalls across industries

UNC System report reveals that state isn’t graduating enough engineering, nursing, education degrees to meet demand

Miles Hayford
Elon News Network

Despite nationwide concerns over the job market, North Carolina’s economy has remained strong, and requires 5,000 to 10,000 more degrees each year from North Carolina universities, according to a report from the University of North Carolina System.

The “Workforce Alignment Report,” published in mid-April, found that the state isn’t graduating enough students in several key industries like engineering, health care and education. Vice President for Strategic Initiatives for the UNC System Mary Varghese said that these key industries make up a chunk of the gap of 5,000 to 10,000.

“We actually need to grow across many different degree programs, and I think that’s unique to our state, because our state is growing in so many different industries,” Varghese said.

North Carolina has seen rapid growth over the past few years, with the Raleigh metro area being the 10th fastest growing metropolitan area in the nation between July 2024 and July 2025, according to U.S. Census data. Census data also showed that more people in the country are moving to North Carolina than any other state with 84,000 people moving in from July 2024 to July 2025. Because of this, demand in many industries in the state has increased.

The report, which analyzed degrees from both public and private universities in the state, found that there is a demand of 3,966 degrees in nursing with a gap of 806, factoring in the degrees that North Carolina puts out. The report reveals that there is an even wider gap in education which is about 1,439, and a gap of 2,662 degrees in engineering. The highest demand was for mechanical engineering degrees.

Chair of the Nursing Department at Elon University Cathy Quay said the shortage in nurses largely stems from many nurses approaching retirement age and because of the barriers to nursing education. Quay said these shortages have real impacts on patients.

“Literature shows that when hospitals



MILES HAYFORD | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Junior Colin Vernon takes apart a BIC lighter in professor Scott Wolter’s “Structure and Properties of Materials” class.

are fully staffed, when they have bachelor-prepared nurses at the bedside, that patients do better,” Quay said. “If we’re going to address this, it can’t just be on an institutional level. It really has to be upstream, and thinking about what policies do we need in place to ensure that nurses have access to education.”

Elon’s nursing program has been steadily growing since 2021 with a 57.1% increase in enrollment between 2024 and 2026, according to the spring registrar’s report. Quay said they have been careful to grow the program while making sure to not compromise the quality of the education. Quay said that they are bringing in more faculty members and expanding their lab space. She said there are still barriers that they have to navigate through, like the lack of nurse educators and limited clinical sites.

Quay said it is vital for Elon to step up and meet this demand because of the impact nurses have.

“We are the ones at the bedside, we’re the ones that provide the care,” Quay said. “We’re the ones that listen to our patients. We’re the ones that really keep the healthcare system running.”

Elon’s engineering program has also seen steady growth recently, according to Scott Wolter, the chair of the Engineering Department. Wolter said that the enrollment will exceed 200 students next year. A big step in the department’s growth will come in fall 2026 when Elon launches

the School of Engineering and Computing, which is currently conducting a dean search. He said that North Carolina has a big need for technology jobs and that educated engineers will be needed to fill them.

“As our society advances, that technology is more advanced. So you need specialized skills. We provide broad skills like basic math, chemistry, physics and some basic engineering course skills,” Wolter said. “But then our students can go into specific disciplines of study. So they’re ready to jump into an engineering position that fits the needs for today.”

Wolter said the department has put a big emphasis on recruitment in the past few years. They have done this through spreading the news about Elon to K-12 schools, hosting an engineering open house on Homecoming Weekend and the launching of an engineering fellows program that allows the school to be somewhat competitive with state school tuition.

North Carolina has focused on improving access to engineering and nursing degrees in the UNC System in recent years. The UNC System invested \$29 million in 2024 to expand nursing programs at 12 universities, and the state General Assembly invested \$125 million to expand engineering programs.

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New majors at Elon gain momentum

Growing enrollment, curricula demonstrate increasing interest

Mia Torres
Elon News Network

After just one year of being launched, the newest majors at Elon University, neuroscience and digital content management, are already gaining traction among students and faculty. They reflect both long-standing interest and rapidly changing industries.

Digital content management developed in about a year and was designed in response to the rapid expansion and shift towards digital media in communication industries. Faculty who teach the course describe it as a way to align academics with a marketplace where digital media, content creation and analytics overlap.

Laura Lacy, a professor of digital content management said,

“The goal of the new major is to basically recognize how fast things are changing in a modern environment all the time and help our students have another avenue to prepare in ways that interest them,” Lacy said.

Rather than focusing on only creating content, the major emphasizes understanding how digital content functions. Students are introduced to concepts such as audience targeting, platform algorithms and branding strategy.

“We’ve talked a lot about social media,” Lacy said. “We’ve talked about some calls to action, everything from how to get people to persuade people that a brand has knowledge or expertise in something, or come across as authentic.”

Other courses help students analyze independent creators, brand-based content teams and media organizations, comparing how each uses platforms differently.

Strategic communications professor Michelle Lashley teaches digital content and the creator economy.

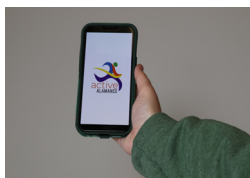
“Successful content doesn’t just happen,” Lashley said. “There is a strategy behind it and it’s not just about going viral. It’s about learning, about audiences and who your audience is.”

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Contamination found in Haw River

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New app aims to connect students to county

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Men’s, women’s tennis take home championship

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THE PENDULUM

A PUBLICATION OF

ELON NEWS
NETWORK

ESTABLISHED 1974 | VOLUME 55, EDITION 25

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The Pendulum

publishes weekly on Wednesdays

ENN Tonight

broadcasts Monday at 6 p.m.

ENN On Air

uploads Thursdays

elonnewsnetwork.com

publishes daily



CORRECTIONS

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

Neuroscience, digital content management majors gain early interest



MIA TORRES | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Professor Michelle Lashley lectures on different types of creator brands.

MAJORS | from cover

Vic Costello the program director of digital content management said the major was intentionally designed to complement other areas of study and many students are double majoring in fields in the communications school as well as outside. He said this reflects the reality that digital content skills are now in multiple industries.

"It goes with anything and everything," said Costello.

Costello said roles in nearly every industry now require some form of digital content expertise.

"In 2025, digital overtook traditional advertising globally," Costello said. "That shift tells you everything about where the industry is going."

Costello said at the beginning of registration, there were 38 digital content management majors and they are expected to reach 50 majors by the end of its first year. That number reflects student curiosity and growing awareness of the role digital media plays in professional environments.

Sophomore Claire Moorhead, who is majoring in cinema and television arts with a digital content management minor, said she was first introduced to the program in a course taught by Costello, before officially declaring the major in her first year.

"It just sounded really interesting," Moorhead said. "It seemed like a really interesting way to examine my film background through a corporate lens, because every company in the world essentially needs a social media manager."

Moorhead also said the program's breadth has been a major advantage.

"You're really getting classes from every single area within communications," Moorhead said. "It feels like you're optimizing yourself for the professional world."

The curriculum has courses ranging from cinema and television arts to strategic communications and media analytics, blending different areas of study into one program.

Moorhead said that the major has already provided tangible professional opportunities, particularly in competitive internship markets.

"I got a ton of interview requests and offers for internships," Moorhead said. "For a lot of these jobs in LA, it's important to know a little bit of everything."

At the same time, the neuroscience

program has undergone changes. After years of student demand and faculty development, the minor has officially been declared a major.

Matt Wittstein, associate professor of exercise science and director of the neuroscience program said there was a lot of demand.

"We knew there was interest. We had something like 170 minors, so the demand was already there," Wittstein said.

William Schreiber, associate professor of psychology, said the transition from major to minor has changed the rhythm of student engagement.

"I no longer have students asking me when the neuroscience major is going to exist," Schreiber said, noting that demand had been present long before the official major launched.

The program was built around encouraging students to integrate diverse disciplines like biology, psychology, chemistry, exercise science and more.

"We don't want our students to feel like a biologist that does neuroscience or feel like a chemist that does neuroscience or an exercise scientist that does neuroscience," Wittstein said. "But instead they feel like a neuroscientist that answers questions from a certain field, using neuroscientific approaches."

In its first year the neuroscience major has enrolled 62 students, with three seniors this year.

Senior Hallie Beeker, started as a biology major and added on neuroscience. The program has provided flexibility and a well-

rounded academic structure.

"I've loved every professor I've had," Beeker said. "They've really allowed me to explore the brain in new ways and tailor my experience to what I'm interested in."

Beeker said her experiences in the major have prepared her for a future in medicine which she plans to pursue after a gap year working in surgical camps in India.

"I think it's prepared me really well for medical school," Beeker said. "It allowed me to explore my interests and go beyond what I originally thought I would study."

Even in their first year, both majors are already drawing attention from prospective students. Faculty said they see strong interest at admissions events, and some students have said the new programs are a deciding factor in choosing Elon.

"They see it and they know what it means," Costello said. "It resonates right way."

As neuroscience and digital content management move into their second year, professors said both programs are still in their early stages, but are expected to play a growing role in Elon University's academic landscape.

Looking ahead, both majors are expected to continue evolving. Neuroscience hopes to expand hands-on learning opportunities and eventually develop dedicated lab spaces for student research.

Digital content management will continue adapting to rapid changes in technology and media consumption. Faculty are updating coursework to include new tools and trends including artificial intelligence and emerging social media platforms.

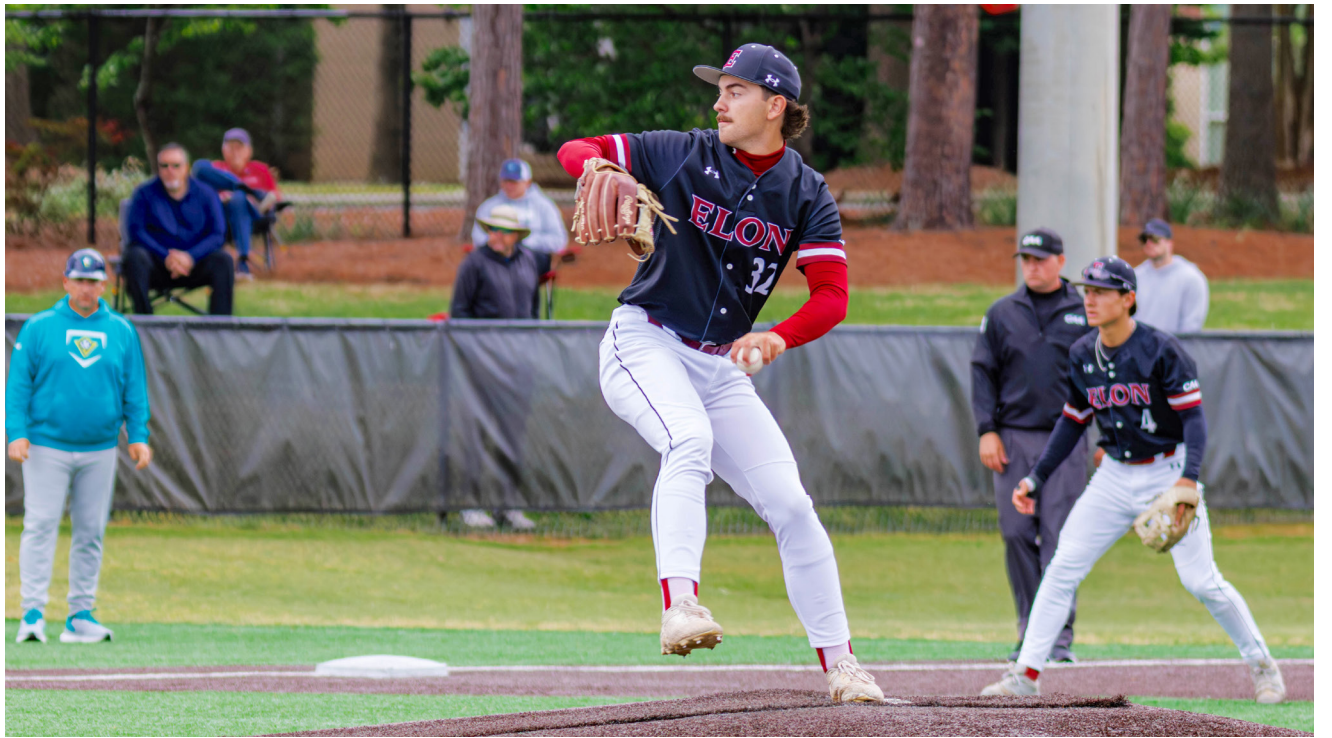


MIA TORRES | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A student takes notes in the "Digital Cont/Creator Economy" class.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Sophomore Tariq Johnson walks down the runway modeling his crafted outfit. The Sustainable Fashion Show was hosted during Earth Week, with all outfits being comprised of repurposed clothing.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Sophomore left-handed pitcher Owen Winebarger pitches during Elon's game against the University of North Carolina, Wilmington on April 26. They lost 8-1 in a series sweep.



KATRINA HOLTZ | PHOTO EDITOR
Junior Ella Schultz performs with accompanying band at Limelight Records' Limefest on April 26 on Young Commons.



ELISSA LEKA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Chabad Elon celebrates the dedication of two Torah scrolls while dancing to music down Truitt Drive and South Oak Avenue on April 26. "A Torah scroll is almost a piece of God," Rabbi Mendy Minkowitz said during the opening ceremony. "It's truly godliness in physical form." Written entirely by hand, Minkowitz said the process of dedicating scrolls is meticulous, time-consuming and costly. Expert scribes dedicate about a year to handwriting roughly 300,000 letters with a feather quill onto leather parchment. Minkowitz said the cost of the scroll makes it rarer to have two dedicated to a single community. One of the scrolls was dedicated to Chabad by the family of Elon alumna Julia Gross. The other was dedicated by the Mendelsohn family, friends of Chabad Elon, in honor of their late family member, who died during Passover last year.



ELISSA LEKA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Rabbi Mendy Minkowitz (left) celebrates the dedication of two Torah scrolls through dance April 26.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Junior Gabe Chapman places a Sprite can into a decorate wall. The activity took place as part of Elon's Earth Fest, held on April 23. Earth Fest provided students with a variety of sustainability-focused foods. "We just want people to know that sustainability is not as daunting as people think it is," said Gillian Prichard, an Eco-Rep for the Historic Neighborhood. "It's actually super simple, and some of your favorite organizations on campus are able to be sustainable as well."

Report finds high-demand in key NC industries

DEGREES | from cover

For degrees that are facing waning student interest, such as education, Varghese said they need to think about what can universities do to keep students in an education degree at a time when many are hesitant about going into it. She said this can be accomplished through loans, additional financial aid and paid teaching hours when students are training for their license.

But Varghese said the report calls for action from both public and private universities.

"It's not only just a road map for the UNC System, but I think of it as we walk alongside public and privates together to tackle a state issue, right? Because there's no way that one can do it on its own," Varghese said.

Varghese said private universities can also help make up the gap for degrees not awarded at public universities and help fill degree gaps in areas like theological vocations. Kathie Sidner, director of workforce and partnerships at the UNC System, pointed towards JetZero wanting to bring more than 14,000 jobs to the state as an example of how both publics and privates will need to work together to supply those jobs.

Looking ahead, Wolter said the job market of engineers in North Carolina is in a good place.

"It's a good place to be at, to be in a position where we need to produce more educated engineers, rather than the other way around," Wolter said. "It's good for all our programs, state schools and private schools."

Quay said she has a lot of ideas for how the nursing program at Elon can grow in the future, including increasing their use of simulations, growing community partnerships and exploring additional programs like graduate programs.

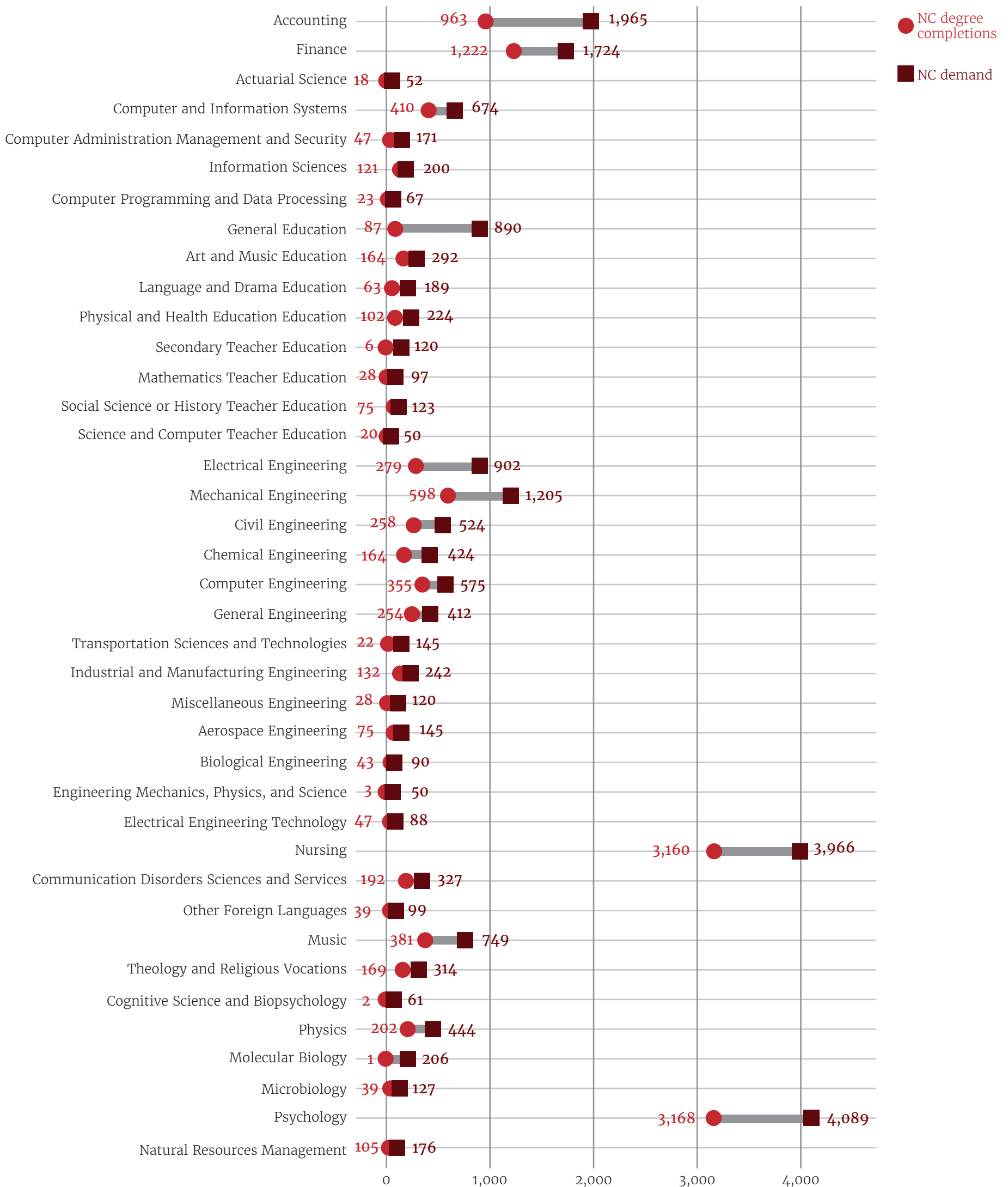
Varghese and Sidner said that they want

this report to signify hope amid lots of economic unrest. Sidner said that North Carolina is growing and that provides a lot of access and opportunities in the future for students.

"My hope is that this provides a more hopeful message to students that are graduating and about to graduate, that this too shall pass and a college degree — as we have seen through our own research, but also a lot of other studies have shown — that it provides a resiliency factor to be able to weather future labor market disruptions, economic change, to be able to change jobs or even industries," Sidner said.

Not enough graduates for high-demand jobs in North Carolina

Each line shows the difference between annual average degree production from 2019-2024 and projected job demand in North Carolina. Demand combines job openings and typical education levels for those jobs, while supply is based on recent graduate totals.



Town of Elon makes budget cuts after university withholds over \$400,000 of expected funding



Elon Fire Department's Engine 8 leaving the scene of a call on Elon University's campus Oct. 24, 2025.

ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

INSPECTIONS | from cover

"We were used to going to the county-level fire marshal for support, for building inspections and for building permits, site reviews and so on," Noltemeyer said.

In a memo, Elon Town Manager Richard Roedner wrote that when the university cut these funds, the town had to implement new budget cuts.

"Because the University is still withholding funds for the fire department, totaling approximately \$423,524, with a commitment of releasing the funds ONLY IF we maintain a positive collaborative relationship with the University (a standard that was never articulated by the University in past, and which no other entity in Elon has the ability to place on our services), I am making the following budgetary cuts, effective immediately," Roedner wrote in the memo.

According to Noltemeyer and Elon Town Manager Richard Roedner, the payments to the town are "voluntary," and carry no binding agreement, unlike PILOT payments, which are made in place of taxes. As a nonprofit institution, Elon University is exempt from paying property taxes.

"We have a letter from the university saying they will give us this money on an annual basis," Roedner said.

Noltemeyer said the friction has been a part of the university adapting to working with a new authority since Graves became

the town fire marshal in 2024.

"Each fire marshal is responsible for the interpretation of the fire code and establishing a process for evaluating compliance with the fire code," Noltemeyer wrote. "We needed to get up to speed with how the new fire marshal, who was now our authority figure, was going to implement supervision of the code, and what his interpretation was going to be."

In an email to Elon News Network, Noltemeyer, wrote that the Daniele buildings were over 30 years old and had met previous fire codes, but not modern ones. He said once the problems were identified, the university installed temporary monitoring systems that were checked monthly to make sure they were operational. Since then, he said the university has begun switching out carbon monoxide detectors with modernized equipment that have back-up battery power.

"Most detectors have now been updated, with the remaining units scheduled for replacement by Aug. 1," Noltemeyer wrote in the email.

Roedner said the initial process of inspections was slow, but the town has since purchased software to speed up this process by allowing inspectors to document their findings online while on-site.

Communication breakdowns between the university and town also fueled the conflict. In one email, Roedner noted

a concern over the HealthEU building process.

Roedner wrote in an email about the "EU review process" that ongoing communication issues between review groups and the school have raised concerns about the Health EU project in recent months.



WHETHER IT'S SEWER AND WATER, WHETHER IT'S FIRE, WHETHER IT'S FIRE INSPECTIONS, WHETHER IT'S PERMITTING, THE UNIVERSITY USES A LOT OF TOWN RESOURCES.

RICHARD ROEDNER
ELON TOWN MANAGER

He said there were also tensions between the on-the-ground inspectors and the higher-level administrators, who weren't present during the inspection, which caused repeated escalations. By mandating that inspectors have written reports, the town has begun to alleviate this problem, according to Roedner.

"There's an inherent conflict between those different hierarchies," Roedner said. "Everything's gotten escalated. So everything has to be in writing now. No more, 'Take care of that law.'"

Roedner said the relationship between the university and the town is complex. In terms of statistics, he said physically half of the town is the university, and a quarter of the town's population is made up of students.

"Based on that alone, they're a huge user of municipal services," Roedner said. "Whether it's sewer and water, whether it's fire, whether it's fire inspections, whether it's permitting, the university uses a lot of town resources."

More than this, Roedner said they have a working relationship when it comes to large projects, such as the sidewalk construction down South Williamson and building the plaza.

Above all, the town and university have a financial relationship.

"They've made contributions, we've taken on responsibility for matching those contributions to create something that we didn't do before," Roedner said.

The university resumed its payments to the town in March, and members from both parties said they are working to maintain communication and their relationship.

"We're intertwined," Roedner said. "There's benefits to it, there's detriments to it, and we both have to live with the good and the bad."



A fire line set up by the Elon Fire Department on Sept. 4, 2025.

SARAH T. MOORE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Concerns rise over Haw River bacterial contamination

Advocates push for stricter oversight at Saxapahaw Wastewater Plant

Kathan Gandhi
Elon News Network

Along a stretch of the Haw River known for tubing, swimming and quiet afternoons on the water, a different kind of presence has drawn concern in recent months. It's one that residents say they can smell before they see.

Community complaints about foul odors near the Saxapahaw Wastewater Treatment Plant prompted advocates to begin testing the river. What they found, according to the Haw River Assembly, were levels of *Escherichia coli* bacteria so high that some samples exceeded what laboratories could measure without dilution. Emily Sutton, riverkeeper with the Haw River Assembly, said the results were unprecedentedly high.

"We have documented discharges of high levels of *E. coli* bacteria," Sutton said. "Levels that have been so high that they've actually been higher than our labs can read."

The area in question is not remote. A park sits directly across the river from the plant and is frequently used by swimmers. Outfitters upstream send kayakers and tubers through the same waters. For Sutton, that proximity raises the stakes.

Exposure to *E. coli* can cause severe gastrointestinal distress, including diarrhea, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting

and fever, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Haw River Assembly began sampling after residents in Saxapahaw reported persistent odors coming from the facility a few months ago. The group collected water samples and shared their findings with the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality.

When conditions did not improve, the organization formally requested the agency reopen the plant's permit with the support of the Southern Environmental Law Center.

At the center of the issue is a regulatory gap. The Saxapahaw plant's current permit does not include limits for fecal bacteria like *E. coli*. It's a fact Sutton said is a major problem.

"Right now, the wastewater treatment plant is so small that they're not required to monitor or limit *E. coli*," Sutton said. "We're asking DEQ to reopen the permit, establish monitoring requirements and set limits for bacterial discharges."

In a statement to Elon News Network, DEQ Public Information Officer Laura Oleniacz confirmed it has been in contact with the plant's owner and operator regarding multiple permit violations since last year. The North Carolina Division of Water Resources has also conducted its own sampling in response to complaints.

While the current permit lacks fecal coliform limits, DEQ officials said the facility is up for renewal and concerns — including potential new monitoring



A dock at the The Haw River Canoe & Kayak Company on April 26 in Saxapahaw, North Carolina.

KATRINA HOLTZ | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

requirements — that will be reviewed as part of that process.

The agency also noted that the plant experienced flooding during Tropical Storm Chantal, which impacted operations, though repairs have since been made.

Still, Sutton points to infrastructure as a key underlying issue.

"The wastewater treatment plant needs significant repairs," she said.

The Alamance County Department of Environmental Health did not respond to ENN's request for comment.

Advocates argue that without enforceable limits and upgraded systems,

problems could persist, especially in a river that has long faced pollution challenges. The Haw River feeds into the Cape Fear River Basin, a drinking water source for communities downstream, adding another layer of urgency to the issue.

For now, the future of the Saxapahaw plant's permit remains under review. But for those who live, work and spend time along the Haw River, the concern is immediate and, at times, impossible to ignore.

The Saxapahaw Wastewater Treatment Plant did not respond to ENN's request for comment.

Saxapahaw Wastewater Treatment Plant feeds into the Haw River

This map shows part of Alamance County where the Haw River meets the Big Alamance Creek. The treatment plant is about nine miles away from Elon University.



Map data from OpenStreetMaps showing the Saxapahaw Wastewater Treatment Plant. Recently high levels of *Escheria coli* bacteria were found in the Haw River near the plant.

DATA VISUALIZATION BY MEGAN WALSH

County commissioners shape Alamance beyond meeting rooms



LILY MOSBACHER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The five-member Alamance County board of commissioners hears from locals during public comment at their April 20 business meeting.

Officials balance growth debates, services, community engagement across county

Lily Mosbacher
Elon News Network

With landfill debates and local boards, the Alamance County board of commissioners makes decisions that shape policies affecting residents across the county.

The board is made up of five elected officials: Chair Kelly Allen, Vice Chair Steve Carter, Ed Priola, Sam Powell and Pamela Thompson. Commissioners are elected to four-year terms, with seats appearing on the ballot during general election cycles.

Allen was appointed to the board in 2024 and is up for re-election in 2026. She received one of two Republican Party nominations during the March 3 primary election. Allen did not respond to Elon News Network's request for comment.

Carter received the second Republican nomination. He was first elected to the board in 2018, reelected in 2022, and is now vying for a third term. There are no term limits enforced on county commissioners.

According to the Alamance County website, Carter is assigned to five committees. Carter said that the work he does extends beyond the Commission's semi-monthly meetings and that he is receiving calls from constituents daily.

Carter said he hopes the work he does

on the commission leads to real impact on residents.

"I love where I live, and I love the people, and I'll always look at it from doing the right thing for Alamance County," Carter said.

Priola was elected to the board as a Republican in 2024 and will be up for reelection in 2028. Priola did not respond to Elon News Network's request for comment.

Powell was appointed to the board by the Republican Party in 2026 after the death of John Paisley Jr. He will also be up for reelection in 2026, but that race will be a separate, unexpired term election. Powell did not respond to Elon News Network's request for comment.

Thompson was elected to the board as a Republican in 2020 and reelected in 2024. Her seat will be up for re-election in 2028.

Thompson changed her political affiliation to unaffiliated in 2025. Thompson said she made that decision because she wanted to focus on leadership rather than party alignment.

Thompson said much of her work focuses on human services, including addressing the opioid crisis, expanding mental health resources and supporting recovery programs.

She said her role as a commissioner often involves working directly with residents outside of formal meetings.

"I'm always working with the public," Thompson said. "I like to go to any kind of event that people invite me to, because I want them to know no matter where I'm at, they can talk to me about anything."

While commissioners cast votes during meetings, much of their role extends beyond the boardroom through coordination with county staff and ongoing engagement with residents.

Heidi York, the county manager, said her office is responsible for implementing the board's decisions and managing daily operations across departments. York was appointed by the board of commissioners.

Staff in the county manager's office act as a bridge between commissioners and departments, helping translate policy decisions into action.

Brian Baker, an assistant county manager, said his role includes representing departmental needs to leadership and ensuring services are delivered regardless of budget constraints.

Commissioners also rely on staff for information as they respond to residents and evaluate issues. York said she is in contact with commissioners on a daily basis, often helping answer questions tied to constituent concerns.

Outside of formal meetings, commissioners spend significant time in the community. According to Baker, staying informed is essential to decision-making.

"If they just sit in the boardroom, and that's the only time they pay attention, they wouldn't be able to make the proper decisions," Baker said.

On April 20, the Commission held a business meeting where many members of the community shared their opinions on

debates such as land use and education. Allen extended the public comment section from 30 minutes to one hour to accommodate the high number of people who signed up.

During that meeting, commissioners approved the heavily debated LCID landfill. Baker said that this approval was the third step in the process, and now his office will be tasked with issuing the permit.

Commissioners heard concerns from residents about the proximity of the landfill to their property, as well as arguments from lawyers on both sides of the proposal.

"It's a very difficult decision between what landowners are allowed to do with their property, and what security you have about what's gonna happen on your neighbor's property," Baker said.

Baker said this decision was complex and recurring.

"These planning and zoning discussions are very cyclical, and they've been cyclical for the past 50 years," Baker said.

Residents also voiced concerns to the commission about large-scale development and underfunding of the Alamance-Burlington School System.

Baker encouraged people to continue to engage with the county commission even when large decisions like the landfill are not actively being discussed.

"I think a lot of times, people don't know how to get started in activism or representing their community, and the answer is to do it at the local level," Baker said.

NC Advisory Council on Cannabis shows need for regulated market

Report supports legalization of marijuana

Abigail Hines
Elon News Network

A report from The North Carolina Advisory Council on Cannabis's recommends to lawmakers the legalization of marijuana, allowing adults to legally purchase, possess and use cannabis through state-licensed retail outlets.

Currently, North Carolina is one of ten states without a regulated market, according to the report. The council outlined several drawbacks of this, including how there is no minimum age requirement on intoxicating hemp-derived tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, products.

The Trump administration signed an order to reclassify medical marijuana from a Schedule I drug to a Schedule III drug April 23. In a post on X, acting Attorney General Todd Blanche said the order will "enable more targeted, rigorous research into marijuana's safety and efficacy, expanding patients' access to treatments and empowering doctors to make better-informed healthcare decisions."

Marijuana is illegal for both recreational and medical use in North Carolina. Hemp is federally defined as cannabis containing no more than 0.3% delta-9 THC and is legal in the state.

When the federal Agriculture

Improvement Act of 2018 removed hemp from the federal Controlled Substances Act, North Carolina removed hemp from the state list of controlled substances. The report notes how North Carolina, unlike many other states, did not implement a system to oversee the production and sale of cannabinoid products.

Kelly Riddle founded the North Carolina Cannabis Chamber, an organization advocating for workforce development, economic growth and community advocacy. Riddle said the lack of oversight on the cannabis industry is concerning, but the presence of hemp producers in the state sets a foundation for future development.

"We don't have a regulated framework," Riddle said. "That means there's no governing body, anything from FDA to a state regulator doing any kind of controls over the products that are out there. The good news is we have a lot of really reputable operators who also operate in highly regulated states. So we have a very strong, reputable market here just in the hemp space."

The Marijuana Legalization and Reinvestment Act, filed in the NC House of Representatives in March 2025, would legalize possession and regulated use of marijuana for adults. Riddle said this legislation would be regulating a market that already exists and is lacking oversight.

According to a 2023 U.S.

cannabis report, North Carolina has the second-largest illicit cannabis sales worth an estimated \$3.2 billion in 2022.

"If a key objective of regulation is to disrupt illicit markets, that end is being achieved by providing people who want to consume cannabis with a legal alternative that protects consumer safety," the council's report states.

As discussions continue throughout the state about the future of cannabis, Riddle said the biggest thing she hopes for is access.

"That's what I want to see, is access to people who choose this as an alternative for an adult-use market, access for people who need this as a medicine, access to, you know, true research and information to understand this product and how it interacts with our bodies," Riddle said. "That would be the perfect future to me."



ILLUSTRATION BY HANNAH NICHOLLS

Elon alums share first-hand reactions to White House Correspondents' Dinner shooting



PHOTO COURTESY OF AL DRAGO

National Guard members and other security officials clear the area at the White House Correspondents' Dinner on April 25 after a shooting that led to the arrest of 31-year-old Cole Tomas Allen.

Journalists continued to cover the event even after shots fired

Charlotte Pfabe
Elon News Network

Investigators are still working to determine the motive behind the shooting at the White House Correspondents' Dinner on Saturday evening. There were over 2,000 people at the dinner, including Elon alums.

Seated on the ground level, Annemarie Bonner '23 said she first wasn't sure what she had heard, but when she realized it was gunshots, the night turned into her worst nightmare.

"I couldn't even think about journalism at that point honestly, because I was like, 'What the actual heck has happened?' And then you're thinking 'Oh, my God, we are the news but we're the newsmakers,'" Bonner said.

The Elon alum and Spectrum News producer hid under her table after hearing

the shots. She attended the event with her coworkers. She said it was her first year at the dinner.

"We're in a room full of journalists with limited cell service, because the ballroom is kind of underground," Bonner said. "There's Wi-Fi, but it's not working that well. I'm trying to call my dad, trying to call my parents. The calls keep failing because everyone's on this Wi-Fi."

NBC Legal Affairs Reporter Gary Grumbach '16 said he had a bird's eye view of the chaos since he was seated in the balcony. After ducking under the table, he said he quickly started taking notes about what he saw and heard.

"I stayed in the ballroom until they kicked us out, until they said, 'Get out of here, go home, this is over,'" Grumbach said. "Because I felt like it was important to share the information that I had from inside the ballroom."

He eventually found time to decompress after leaving the dinner, but was then called back to continue reporting live on-air for a

few more hours.

Outside of the ballroom where Bonner and Grumbach sat, photojournalist Al Drago '15 took photos on the red carpet. After hearing the shots, Drago said his first instinct was reaching for his longer camera lens.

"When I heard the gunfire, I had ducked for cover, but also at the same time moving quickly to get the right camera gear and start shifting in a place that I could have a vantage point of the scene of that was unfolding," Drago said.

Drago said he focused on still getting the story even in the chaos. He traveled to the event by bike, so after leaving the dinner, he followed President Donald Trump's convoy to the White House to capture Trump's remarks — by bike.

"In that moment, the most important thing beyond my immediate safety was to continue photographing and trying to document the scene," Drago said.

Bonner said the escalators to leave the event afterwards were crowded and there were people everywhere. Over the following

hours, Bonner left the event and traveled back to her news station to produce a live breaking news segment regarding the shooting.

U.S. Attorney General Todd Blanche said police arrested the suspect who was armed with a shotgun, handgun and knives.

The suspect, 31 year-old Cole Tomas Allen, appeared in court April 27. Federal prosecutors charged him with attempting to assassinate Trump.

Investigators are still reviewing evidence but Blanche says initial findings indicate that members of the administration were Allen's primary target.

"You never think you're going to be part of the story, and then all of a sudden, you're part of the story here, and that's an uncomfortable feeling," Grumbach said. "Because that's not our jobs here. But I think it was an important time to be able to make sure we were physically okay, which we were, and then do our jobs."

Trump spoke to Fox News and said he hopes that the dinner is rescheduled to occur within the next month.

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Active Alamance app bridges gap between campus, community

New partnership aims to help students, residents discover local parks, programs

Emma Luckman
Elon News Network

The Elon bubble is a phrase discussed by students on campus, representing a self-contained world where daily life often begins and ends within Elon University. However, a new digital tool is working to burst that bubble by connecting students, faculty, and residents to the hidden gems of Alamance County.

The Active Alamance app, which recently reached its nine-month milestone, serves as a centralized hub for the seven different Recreation and Parks departments within the county. Before its launch, information regarding local trails, events, and sports programs was scattered across various municipal websites and social media pages, making it difficult for newcomers and students to navigate local offerings.

"It really serves as a central hub for people to get that information, as before it was all on their own websites," said Nicole McGinty, a program officer with Impact Alamance and an Elon alum. "So sometimes information was missed, as well as on all their different Facebooks."

The idea for the app was sparked during a meeting of the Alamance Wellness Collaborative, a group managed by the community health foundation Impact Alamance.

After a

survey conducted nearly two years ago revealed that residents simply wanted to know more about fun activities in their own backyard, the foundation partnered with Golly Enterprises to create a streamlined mobile experience.

McGinty knows first-hand how easy it is for students to remain unaware of the resources surrounding them.

"My hope is students can use this app to help kind of get them off campus and explore," McGinty said. "If they just want to get out for like a hike or a break from campus, just awareness of the parks around them. Some of them, like Joe Davidson Park, is like right around the corner from Elon, and I don't think a lot of students are aware of all of those things."

The app goes beyond just listing names of locations. It features a comprehensive parks and trails directory, an interactive map with turn-by-turn directions, and specific filters for facility rentals and sports leagues. Brandy McCandless, the marketing supervisor for Graham Recreation and Parks, noted that the app encourages discovery by placing diverse activities in one location.

"With the app being that everything from our parks to our trails to our programs to our events are in one location, if someone is going to look up a park or they are looking up possibly a pickleball program, it is a great way to discover everything else that our departments have going on," McCandless said. "If you are going to look for pickleball, you are going to discover so much more, so many more ways to be active."

The app's impact is not limited to physical health. By highlighting group programming like community concerts and festivals, the platform fosters social connection,

which is a metric of health that McGinty believes is vital for both long-term residents and the student population.

"You kind of hit those key different metrics of health through the different programming happening," McGinty said. "It is a good avenue for social connection, as it is like group programming, so you get that physical activity, as well as social connection with others."



IT IS A GOOD AVENUE FOR SOCIAL CONNECTION, AS IT IS LIKE GROUP PROGRAMMING, SO YOU GET THAT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, AS WELL AS SOCIAL CONNECTION WITH OTHERS.

NICOLE MCGINTY
IMPACT ALAMANCE PROGRAM OFFICER

With over 3,600 downloads already recorded, as of July 14, 2025, the teams behind Active Alamance are focused on sustained growth with a goal of reaching 5,000 users by the one-year mark. McCandless explained that all the county departments are working together rather than competing to highlight these opportunities.

"We have so many Recreation and Parks

departments across our county to try to find out what each one is doing and so that we are not, we don't compete with one another," McCandless said. "We work with one another, and we really want to highlight these opportunities to be active and to get outdoors."

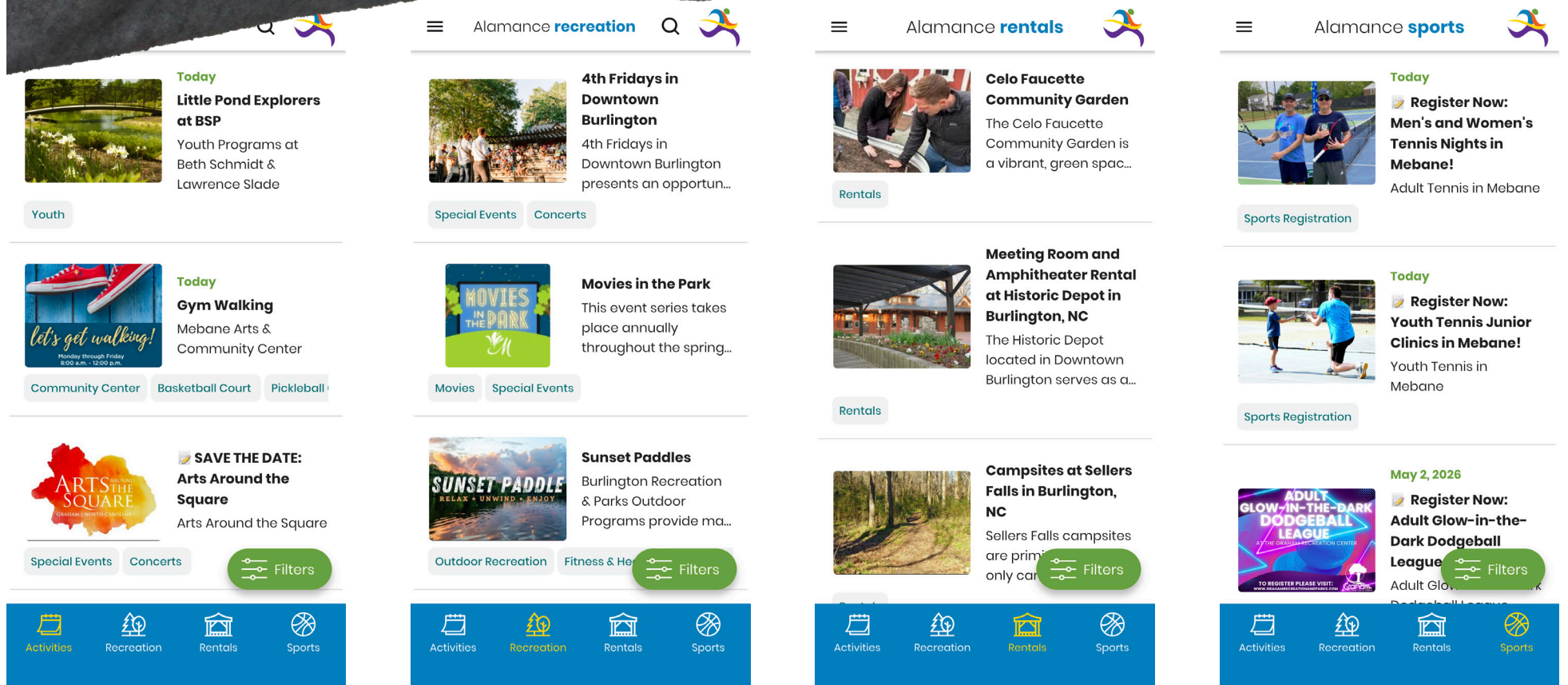
While the app is a major asset for students, McGinty also emphasized its value for the broader Elon community, including faculty and staff who may be looking for family-friendly weekend plans.

"There is the student side, but this is also a great resource for faculty and staff at Elon, as well as a lot of them have families in the area or they live here too," McGinty said. "There is a lot of great programs on the app as well for young kids and things to do with families."

As the partnership between the seven recreation departments continues to evolve, the goal remains simple: making sure that no one in Alamance County feels like they have nowhere to go. Whether it is finding a quiet trail for a walk or joining a local sports league, the Active Alamance app is working to make the community's best resources finally at the tip of everyone's fingers.



MEGAN WALSH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Photo illustration of the Active Alamance app. The app combines information from seven different Recreation and Parks departments within Alamance County to encourage Elon students to go beyond the "Elon Bubble." Screenshots from the Active Alamance app.



Student-led theater brings cartoon classic to stage



KATRINA HOLTZ | PHOTO EDITOR

From left, Renegade Productions cast members Harry Naren, Keller Gillian, Andrew Juhaz and Kat Macdonald lift Laird Stearns — in the role of Patrick Star — while rehearsing the number of “Super Sea Star Savior” from “The SpongeBob Musical” on April 22 at the College Street Tap House. There were four performances of the musical April 23 to 26, with all shows being sold-out within two hours of ticket reservations opening.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

From left, freshmen Sophie Kewak and Keith Dubois rehearse for their roles in “The SpongeBob Musical” on April 22 at the College Street Tap House. Kewak and Dubois play Sandy Cheeks and SpongeBob SquarePants, respectively.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Freshman Keith Dubois performs “Bikini Bottom Day,” the opening number of the musical, in rehearsal April 22. The musical is based on the animated Nickelodeon show “SpongeBob SquarePants.” The show follows SpongeBob and his friends on a mission to save Bikini Bottom, the town they live in, from impending doom.



KATRINA HOLTZ | PHOTO EDITOR

Junior Calvin Monfried, in the role of Patchy the Pirate, rehearses a scene April 22 where Patchy himself gets ready to watch “The SpongeBob Musical.” Patchy is president of the SpongeBob fan club, but is kicked out of the show for trying to record a “pirate copy” of the production.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Sophomore Laird Stearns and freshman Keith Dubois in the roles of Patrick Star and SpongeBob SquarePants rehearse April 22 for Renegade Productions’ spring musical, “The SpongeBob Musical.” In this scene, the two take in Patrick’s rock before singing, “BFF,” a song about being best friends forever.

Elon University cannot stay silent on ICE



Miles Prenda
Columnist

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement operations have surged since President Trump began his second term. Meanwhile, the Alamance County Sheriff's Office has worked hand-in-hand with the agency. Throughout that time, Elon University has remained silent as ICE operated in its own backyard, risking the safety of students, staff and faculty alike.

In November 2025, leading faculty at Elon University received an email from administrators Jon Dooley and Randy Williams. The message discussed questions the university had received from the Elon community on recent ICE operations in North Carolina cities.

But the email was just that: a discussion. Despite one "after-action item" to explore the addition of "know-your-rights resources" to the Rave Guardian app, no such changes have been made. In fact, the university has not released a public statement on ICE's late 2025 arrests across North Carolina.

Elon's many webpages show few results when it comes to resources for undocumented immigrant students. At time of publishing, Elon Academy's "Planning for College" site provides links under the subheading "Undocumented Students." Of the seven links, three are broken, including one labeled "Resources for Undocumented Students."

While Elon sends emails, ICE looks to dramatically expand its presence in North Carolina. News outlets such as the Charlotte Observer and The Assembly report ICE keeping detainees — often indefinitely and without oversight — in three secret "hold rooms" across the state, negotiating contracts with private prisons to hold immigrants awaiting deportation and considering turning warehouses into detention centers.

The university confronted ICE during President Trump's first term, with Elon University president Connie Book and other university leaders joining a 2020 lawsuit challenging a policy requiring international students to return to their home countries if their colleges moved to fully online learning. A statement was issued to the Elon community condemning the ICE directive and emphasizing the benefits of a diverse international student population.

No such action or statements of solidarity can be seen today.

Alamance County

Elon University should be held to an exceptional standard in the protection of its community due to Alamance County's history of biased policing and ICE cooperation.

Alamance County Sheriff Terry Johnson gained national attention in 2012 after a lawsuit by the Department of Justice alleged that deputies of the Alamance County Sheriff's Office were four to 10 times more likely to stop Latino drivers than non-Latino drivers. While the case was ultimately dismissed, the investigation indicated widespread bias at the sheriff's office. The DOJ report said that Johnson fostered bias against Latinos, calling Mexicans "taco eaters," for example.

In 2019, Johnson leased 40 beds of the Alamance County Detention Center to ICE. In November 2025, the agreement was terminated, but not out of anti-ICE sentiment. Johnson ended the agreement following the passing of NC House Bill 307 (Iryna's Law), which made sweeping changes to North Carolina's criminal justice system. Johnson feared that the changes would result in overcrowding at the already over-capacity center, and sought to prioritize beds for local inmates. Johnson, alongside Rep. Richard Hudson, has been in talks with ICE to renegotiate the contract, The Assembly reports. In



ENN FILE PHOTO

Alamance County Sheriff Terry Johnson, who recently ended the county's agreement with ICE.

an interview with The Assembly, Johnson said he feels "compelled" to help ICE enforce immigration laws.

ICE and Alamance County are inextricably linked, at least under Johnson. But Alamance isn't the only part of North Carolina where ICE is expanding.

In late 2025, the Department of Homeland Security conducted "Operation Charlotte's Web" in Charlotte, NC, meant to target undocumented immigrants posing a threat to public safety, in which fewer than one-third of those arrested by border patrol were categorized as "criminal aliens," according to CBS.

In January 2026, the American Civil Liberties Union acquired a heavily redacted document from DHS detailing plans to establish new ICE detention centers across the United States. One proposal suggested a site in Greensboro, about half an hour from Elon.

Legally, ICE cannot enter nonpublic areas at a university, such as dorms, offices and in-session classrooms without a warrant signed by a judge. However, the agency has not always followed the law. In January 2026, Columbia University student Ellie Aghayeva was taken from her dorm by DHS without a proper warrant. In October 2025, ProPublica found more than 50 instances of citizens being detained after having their citizenship questioned, a tally believed "almost certainly incomplete."

Elon cannot rely on the expectation that ICE will act in good faith. Under the Trump administration, broken websites and the absence of clear, public statements are detrimental to student safety.

How did we get here?

So why, while espousing the "global experience" and "inclusive excellence," has the university turned a blind eye to the support of immigrant students in this dangerous environment? Like many other issues the Elon community takes with the University's administration, it may be about money.

Elon received \$6.3 million in federal funds during the 2025 fiscal year. In the past, institutions that have opposed the Trump Administration's agenda have been aggressively targeted with funding cuts and federal probes. Perhaps Elon's administrators fear retaliation for protecting immigrant students against unlawful immigration enforcement practices.

Given its demographics, Elon is more likely

to have a smaller immigrant population than other schools. Could the university believe the population of at-risk students too small to risk the consequences of substantial action?

What can we do?

Where Elon fails to fulfill its duty to protect immigrant students, others have filled the gap. Individual faculty have hosted Siembra NC, providing training on identifying and reporting ICE vehicles, allowing the organization to notify local communities. Through training, you can join the effort to protect Elon and North Carolina's immigrant communities, so be on the lookout for upcoming events.

American University, a peer institution of Elon, issued a statement less than a month after President Trump's inauguration, reaffirming its commitment to a diverse community, outlining its approach to immigration-related matters, and providing detailed guidance on what to do if agents arrive on campus.

In the five months since Dooley and Williams' email, the Elon community at large has received no guidance from the University on immigration enforcement. Since Trump took office, 41,047 people between the ages of 18 and 22 have been arrested, according to the Deportation Data Project. In January 2026, the State Department announced the revocation of 8000 student visas.

Elon's mission statement commits the University to fostering "a respect for human differences, passion for a life of learning, personal integrity, and an ethic of work and service."

When we consider Alamance County's hosting of ICE and its inhumanity, Elon becomes an island, and Elon's leadership has done little to fight the rising tide.

Students and faculty now construct their own levees against the crashing waves, unsupported by administrators. Even when it comes to the most basic steps, such as expressing solidarity with immigrant students or explaining our rights, the university has chosen to avoid the costs of protecting students.

If Elon cares to fulfill its own mission and duty to student safety, it should condemn the actions of ICE and Alamance County's association with it. It should act as a bastion of humanity, not a doormat for authoritarianism. Even the bare minimum, such as ensuring website links work, would be miles ahead of what we see today.



Men's, women's tennis sweep championship weekend

Both teams win second CAA title in respective program histories

Kathan Gandhi
Elon News Network

The Elon Phoenix took over championship weekend.

Both Elon men's and women's tennis captured titles at the Colonial Athletic Association Championships on April 19, marking a program sweep defined by breakthrough moments and a shared emphasis on team energy.

For the men, the victory was years in the making.

After falling to the University of North Carolina, Wilmington, Seahawks in four straight CAA finals, the Phoenix finally broke through. The first step was flipping the doubles point.

After senior Veljko Krstic and sophomore Nikola Parichkov sealed Elon's first doubles win, senior Oskar Antinheimo and freshman Nick Fisk rallied from a 5-3 deficit to win their doubles match, clinching the crucial early point for Elon. Grabbing the opening doubles point is something the Phoenix had never done in any of their matchups against the Seahawks.

"I felt like we were doing the right things

the whole match," Antinheimo said. "We just stepped up, played more aggressive, showed positive body language and put the pressure on them."

That shift proved decisive. Antinheimo fell to his knees in excitement after his comeback victory in doubles. With the confidence and momentum on their side, Antinheimo said the team knew they could get the job done.

From there, Elon delivered what head coach Maciek Sykut called one of the team's most complete performances of the season. The Phoenix closed out the match behind strong singles play, including a key point from Antinheimo.

For a senior class that had come up short in past CAA finals, this moment carried extra weight.

"It felt unbelievable, kind of surreal," Antinheimo said. "Four years of hard work, and finally getting the job done."

Sykut echoed that sentiment, pointing to both perseverance and timing, speaking to the continued hard work seniors on the team had put in.

"They came up short three years in a row in the finals to the same team," Sykut said. "To send them off in this fashion, it was pure joy."

While men's tennis broke through, the women's team reinforced its dominance.

Elon women's tennis captured its second consecutive CAA title, relying on a mix of experience and composure in key moments. Strong doubles play set the tone early, with consistent partnerships — including sophomores Lisa Kranec and Cornelia Kack — helping establish momentum.



FOUR YEARS OF HARD WORK, AND FINALLY GETTING THE JOB DONE.

OSKAR ANTINHEIMO
SENIOR

"I feel like we have a really good understanding of each other's game," Kranec said. "We like to be aggressive, get to the net and take control of points."

That aggressive mindset carried into singles, where Kranec ultimately clinched the championship in a tense third-set tiebreaker.

Her approach was simple: reset after every point.

"Zero-all, just reset," Kranec said. "I kept telling myself, 'Another one, another one.'"

The stakes couldn't have been higher. Whoever won the tiebreaker would be CAA champions. Both the Elon women's and men's teams were watching.

Despite the pressure of the moment, she said it never fully registered.

"I didn't even feel it," Kranec said. "I was just so focused on what I wanted to do."

Head coach Elizabeth Anderson credited the entire lineup for setting up the clinch, highlighting contributions across the board — including Cornelia's steady play and Mariana's energy and resilience.

"Lisa did a tremendous job, but it was a total team effort," Anderson said. "They competed with tons of energy and really trusted each other."

That energy has become a defining trait of the program.

"How loud can we get?" Kranec said. "That's something we pride ourselves on."

According to Anderson, that mindset is contagious.

"I think that energy makes a big difference," she said. "They play together, they fight together, and that shows up in moments like this."

The back-to-back title also reflects continuity. With a similar lineup returning from last year's championship team, the Phoenix entered the tournament with confidence and experience.

"We went into the season knowing we did it once, we can do it again," Kranec said.

Now, both teams turn their attention to the NCAA Tournament, where they'll face a new level of competition. But they carry the same belief.

"We're playing with house money," Antinheimo said. "We're going to enjoy it and put our best foot forward."

After a weekend that saw both programs reach the summit of the CAA, Elon enters the national stage as a program peaking at the right time.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ELON ATHLETICS
The Elon women's tennis team raises the CAA trophy after winning its second conference title in two straight years on April 19.

TOP PHOTO COURTESY OF ELON ATHLETICS
The Elon men's tennis team raises the CAA trophy after beating Wilmington in the tournament finals on April 19. The win was Elon's first championship under head coach Maciek Sykut, after four straight losses in the finals to the Seahawks.