

Policies differ across departments as Elon integrates AI

Elon University gives professors final say in class policies

Evan Cooper
Elon News Network

As Elon University continues work to integrate artificial intelligence on campus, professors and students have varying degrees of adoption. Elon junior Emmaline Cousins, a public health major, said she frequently uses AI in her personal life but avoids using it for the majority of her school work.

"I think using it in a way of researching health topics is not the best way to use AI, because it's a chat box telling you information based on the algorithm," Cousins said. "But outlining things or formatting emails is a good way to use it."

Cousins is taking the class PSY 3704: Psychology of Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood taught by Sarah Bunnell, an associate professor of psychology. In Bunnell's syllabus for PSY 3704 she outlines the accepted use of AI for each type of assignment, which is limited to brainstorming and image generation for case studies and a self-concept map.

While most assignments in Bunnell's

class do not allow AI usage, Bunnell said this is done to make sure students are properly engaging with course content. Bunnell recognizes that AI can be a tool to facilitate learning, and said all AI use must be disclosed according to American Psychological Association guidelines.

"One of the key learning objectives is to learn 'how do I apply really complicated frameworks and theories to myself and others,'" Bunnell said. "Doing the work of actual application and thinking about yourself when doing written reflections, that's critical. That can't be outsourced."

According to Elon's Generative AI Statement published by the Office of the Provost, Elon University sees generative AI as a tool for enhancing — but not replacing — teaching and learning.

"In line with our mission, we recognize the importance of equipping our students with the necessary skills to embrace technology for enhanced learning and engagement in their personal, professional, and civic lives," stated the Office of the Provost.

The statement acknowledges that while AI is effective in some uses, it is not applicable in other aspects.

[See AI | pg. 2](#)

AI Use

The rapid surge of generative artificial intelligence provides us with the opportunity to think deeply about the purposes of education and how to balance the time-saving benefits of technologically assisted tasks with the importance of human-created knowledge. For each assignment, I indicate whether AI usage is authorized or not, and in which capacities.

What Do I Do If I'm Stuck?

- Take a break
- Look at the code given in class
- Work through examples on paper
- Try talking through ideas with a friend
- Ask AI or search online for **general help** with coding or debugging, like you would a tutor for the class

AI Policy. You may not use generative AI of any sort (ChatGPT, for example) to generate ideas or questions, summarize texts, outline possible papers, suggest revisions, or any other substantive task. You may not enter any class material (reading assignments, assignment descriptions or rubrics, feedback you have received, etc.) into any generative AI tool for any reason. No AI tool may be used during class meetings.

GRAPHIC BY EVAN COOPER

A collage highlighting the varying artificial intelligence use policies in different classes.

Dismissal of Leandro case concerns public school advocates

Case called for state-allocated funding for public school programs, teachers, administrators

Kate Gray
Elon News Network

The Leandro Comprehensive Remedial Plan, a 2021 proposed public school funding plan to ensure North Carolina meets its educational standards as outlined in the state constitution, called for \$5.5 billion over eight years.

In Alamance County, the plan would have allocated \$56.7 million to the Alamance-Burlington School System — a 38% budget increase as of 2022 — and \$15.7 million to early education programs by 2028.

However, in early April 2026, the North Carolina Supreme Court overturned previous rulings and officially dismissed the 1994 Leandro lawsuit that inspired the 2021 remedial plan. The state Supreme Court asserted in a 4-3 decision that the courts are not authorized to force state funding without legislative approval.

Lauren Fox, interim president of educational policy think tank Public School Forum of North Carolina, said she believes the ruling will be detrimental to the state's education system. She said challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Hurricane Helene and increasing mental health issues among students have exacerbated existing flaws in public schools.

"This ruling is really devastating," Fox said. "It's been made into a political issue but what I'm thinking about is the kids across the state that are in our schools right now. Whatever the court ruling is, I don't understand how we can do such a disservice to our students."

Leandro v. State of North Carolina was first filed in 1994 by families and school districts in five low-income counties — Hoke, Cumberland, Robeson, Halifax and Vance



ANJOLINA FANTARONI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A bus outside of Audrey W. Garrett Elementary School on Feb. 2.

— arguing that their districts did not have enough money to provide an equal education for their children.

The North Carolina Constitution states that "The General Assembly shall provide by taxation and otherwise for a general and uniform system of free public schools, which shall be maintained at least nine months in every year, and wherein equal opportunities shall be provided for all students."

The Leandro case claimed disparities in public school funding violated the state constitution by denying certain students a sound, basic education, according to Every Child NC, a statewide coalition that advocates for students' right to strong public education.

Leandro Context

The Leandro case has a complex history. According to the Public School Forum of North Carolina, the state Supreme Court

heard the initial case in 1997 and ruled that every child has the constitutional right to a sound, basic education. A superior court agreed in 2002, ruling that the state was not constitutionally compliant in providing qualified teachers, strong principals and resources for all educational needs. This was upheld by the state Supreme Court in 2004.

In 2018, Superior Court Judge David Lee appointed WestEd, an independent educational consultant, to develop a set of recommendations to ensure the state school system was in compliance with the constitution. Based on their report, the 2021 Leandro Comprehensive Remedial Plan was created.

In 2021, Judge Lee ordered the state of North Carolina to take action to implement the remedial plan. The legislature refused and appealed to the state supreme court, which

ruled in 2022 the legislature must fund years two and three of the Leandro Plan.

Before funds could be allocated to the affected communities, the 2022 midterm elections shifted the state Supreme Court to a 5-2 Republican majority. Several legislators called for the funds to be halted and the Supreme Court to rehear arguments, creating the Hoke County Board of Education v. State of North Carolina case.

In early April the court dismissed the case and all Leandro decisions after 2017, saying the courts do not have constitutional authority to order the legislature to spend state funds, the case did not follow proper procedure to establish subject matter jurisdiction and the education system has changed too significantly since 1994.

The North Carolina Justice Center is a nonprofit anti-poverty organization and founding partner of the Every Child NC coalition. Matthew Ellinwood, director of the Education & Law Project at the North Carolina Justice Center, explained Leandro had provided a way to interpret the state constitution's declaration of educational rights and new questions arise without it.

"The legislature could always act to uphold those rights outside of a case — the constitution remains unchanged," Ellinwood said. "Leandro had been the way of defining what that exact right is and with that being closed, something else will be needed; a new case."

State Budget

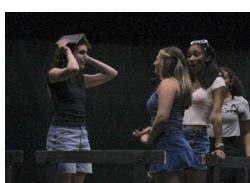
With the Leandro Plan off the table, public school advocates are pushing for increased spending on schools from the state budget. However, North Carolina is the only state without a budget, operating on its last approved budget from 2023.

[See LEANDRO | pg. 3](#)



Vetoed legislation still affects DEI initiatives

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Professors take on AI integration in classroom

AI | from cover

Elon University gives faculty the power to decide how AI will be used or discouraged in their classes, and states that these expectations should be clearly communicated to students.

Elon University has been working to integrate AI on campus since 2023, with the publication of Elon's six AI principles. Since then, Elon has launched initiatives like Elon Q&A and more to encourage students to use artificial intelligence. One example is the Make Your Mark: AI Poster Competition, an event hosted by the Elon AI Hub, School of Communications and Love School of Business.

Shannon Duvall, a professor of computer science and Interim Associate Dean of Elon College, is accepting of AI in her classes. Duvall began her PhD in artificial intelligence in 1997, before generative AI was a popular concept. Though the understanding of AI has changed, Duvall said she is still as excited about its potential uses.

"Obviously, my students love it," Duvall said. "It does make sense that our students are early adopters, that they're excited about tech, that they're fascinated by how it works, which is good because I'm fascinated by it as well."

Duvall's intro-level courses allow AI use, but she has increased in-class assessments and encourages students to use the AI for learning rather than doing. Her upper-level courses discuss how AI can be ethically used in the computer science field, and how companies may use or discourage it. In her classes, using AI to write code for you is considered cheating.

According to Duvall, much of the computer science field has been quick to adopt AI, with programs like Claude Code utilized to increase productivity.



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SHANNON DUVALL
COMPUTER SCIENCE PROFESSOR

For professors that are against AI use in their classes, like professor of philosophy Ann Cahill, AI has created a "hostile learning environment" for her students.

"My approach is that its presence has created pressure on my students to make decisions that they didn't have to 3 years ago," Cahill said. "They have to decide,



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Please reach out if you have any questions about these guidelines. The American Psychological Association has issued [guidance on the requirements](#) for clearly disclosing when AI has been used in the creation of an intellectual product. Using AI in unauthorized ways, or using AI without disclosing how you used AI in the creation of an assignment, constitutes academic misconduct, as described in the honor code (below).



GRAPHIC BY EVAN COOPER

An illustration of the syllabus for PSY 3704: Psychology of Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood, highlighting the class's use policy for generative artificial intelligence.

'do I ask generative AI to summarize this terribly difficult philosophical article,' rather than have struggled themselves through it."

Though Cahill makes it clear in her syllabuses that she does not allow any AI usage in her classes, she has had to change or remove assignments that were difficult to enforce these policies on. Cahill said she has started making her tests timed and proctored in computer labs to make sure students are not using AI to cheat, a solution she said she resents.

According to Cahill, AI use in professional philosophy is regarded with suspicion and seen as unethical. Cahill said the philosophy department is drafting and developing an official departmental policy against AI use.

Cahill is the co-coordinator for the AI Critical Working Group, a grassroots team of faculty and staff that formed out of concerns of unaddressed desires to exclude AI from some learning spaces. One of the group's first additions to campus included designation on OnTrack of AI-free classes.

"We have had meetings with the Elon Core Curriculum Committee, we've had discussions with the university curriculum committee, we've had multiple meetings with the director of AI integration," Cahill said. "As we went about starting to advocate for these things, I have not felt a lack of institutional engagement with our work."

Associate professor of law Caroleen Dineen said that the School of Law doesn't have a uniform policy on AI, and that it's based on professors. She said this is not only because law professors have differing opinions on AI, but also because each aspect of law has different possibilities for integrating AI.

"Students need to be prepared to use technology, or at least hire people who know how to use technology," Dineen said. "It's important for them to understand that, but they also have ethical obligations to make sure they are presenting accurate information on duty of candor of court."

As interim associate dean of Elon College, Duvall has seen many different reactions to the integration of AI. She said many students in social studies and humanities are skeptical of AI, while many computer science students were quicker to adopt it. Even though she's encouraged AI use, other computer science professors have chosen not to adopt AI into their classrooms.

Duvall said that it's important not to generalize department feelings toward AI, that reactions toward it can be based on personal biases for or against AI.

"Some people are early adopters, some people are late adopters," Duvall said. "I see more in terms of individual faculty and their individual feelings about it, more so than whole departmental feelings."

ADVERTISEMENT

CORRECTIONS

The April 15 edition of The Pendulum incorrectly identified the full name of SURF in multiple articles. The event is called the Spring Undergraduate Research Forum.

The article "Student tackles toxic water" in the April 15 edition of The Pendulum was cut off. The full article can be read online on ElonNewsNetwork.com.

In the April 15 edition of The Pendulum, junior Sophie Remisio's internship was incorrectly identified. Remisio interned at the Duke Center for WaSH-AID.

Elon News Network regrets these errors.

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Elon junior Kailey Zimmer speaks to a group of STEM Saturday attendees April 18. The event, held at Elon University, gave Alamance-Burlington School System high school students hands-on experience in STEM — science, echnology, engineering and math — through labs and presentations. ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



KATRINA HOLTZ | PHOTO EDITOR
Students make bracelets and other crafts with beads at the Gender and LGBTQIA Center's annual Spring Pride event on April 17 at Young Commons.



ANJOLINA FANTARONI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Sophomore Noah Elliott shows off his handmade pendants and rings during the BROdly Art Crawl on April 6 in Schar Hall, sponsored by the Elon Healthy Masculinties Initiative. His ringwork uses materials such as moissanite, Australian opal and synthetic rubies. "I view an art as anything you dedicate time to suck at it first, and then you get better and better with it," Elliott said.



Sophomore Laila Cottman line dances at the Student Union Board and Black Student Union Board's "A Night at The Met" on April 18 at the ballroom at The Inn at Elon. KATRINA HOLTZ | PHOTO EDITOR



KATRINA HOLTZ | PHOTO EDITOR

Students pose at the photo booth at the Student Union Board and Black Student Union's "The Night at The Met" event April 18 at the ballroom at The Inn at Elon. According to BSU's PhoenixConnect page, the event is meant to serve as a formal gathering for students to come together and celebrate Black-identifying individuals and their achievements on campus. This is the third year that the Student Union Board and Black Student Union have hosted a ball in the spring.



ANJOLINA FANTARONI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

From left, Elon professors Matt Wittstein, Kirstin Ringelberg and Andrew Monteith look at hanging art during the BROldy Elon Art Crawl on April 6 in Schar Hall. The event's name was a pun created by Monteith — the Elon Healthy Masculinities Initiative coordinator — to blend together the term "bro" and Boldy Elon, the name of the university's strategic plan. The goal of the art crawl was to make space for creativity, particularly giving men the opportunity to showcase their art. "The goal here was really about fostering community creativity and just doing something new," Monteith said.

Spring musical creates 'historical fantasia'

'First Daughter Suite' will have 4 shows May 2 to 4 in Scott Studios

Megan Walsh
Elon News Network

From one scene to the next everyday arguments bleed into turning a first lady into a duck and killing someone with a doll. Audiences will explore the inner lives of the first ladies and daughters of United States presidents in Elon University's production of "First Daughter Suite."

The musical, written by Michael John Lachuisa, will be performed in Roberts Studio Theatre from May 2 to 4.

Director and professor Alexandra Warren said the show features four sections, or "suites," highlighting first ladies of the United States and their daughters. Warren said the show is set before social media, a time when the first lady's image had to be more perfected under the pressure cooker of attention they received.

"It's very different when all you have is sort of that one magazine picture, or that one newspaper article," Warren said. "The pace is slower, so the stakes are higher for those moments when they're captured."



THIS IS ONE OF THE FIRST TIMES THAT I DON'T FEEL LIKE I HAVE TO OVER-EXPLAIN MY CHARACTER.

EMMA BRUCE
SOPHOMORE

Warren said the show focuses on mother-daughter relationships and how the pressure of public life affects them. The show uses satire to poke fun at the women and historical events in what Warren said the writer called a "historical fantasia."

Junior music theatre major Tinkie Jones plays both Rosalynn Carter, wife of former President Jimmy Carter, and Laura Bush, wife of former President George W. Bush. She said the historical fantasia refers to the show's combination of real people with fictional events, putting the people in wild situations.

"These characters are obviously real people, and they really were the wives and daughters of presidents, and we know somewhat about them from their time in the public eye," Jones said. "But Lachuisa really puts them in situations that are going to surprise the audience and make them wonder what these women were really like, or how much we really know about these women."

There is not much known about the first ladies, but even less about their daughters, according to professor of history Rod Clare. He said many first ladies were either a traditional supporting wife or used their role for activism, but were generally less politically active as a result of sexism.

"The presidents themselves often recognize what a valuable person the first lady was not just for personal, like, 'I want a shoulder to lean on after the days long,' but giving them actual advice," Clare said. "These women are very intelligent."

The show features an all-female cast and mostly female production team, something sophomore music theatre major Emma Bruce said has allowed her to feel more free in her acting.

"This is one of the first times that I don't feel like I have to over-explain my character," Bruce said. "Because I think all of us just get it. Normally, I feel like I'm having to justify the actions of my character to the director."

Bruce plays both Betty Ford, wife to former President Gerald Ford, and Nancy Reagan, wife to former President Ronald Reagan. She said the cast has focused on the idea of the women in the show having a porcelain shell and dealing with what happens when that shell cracks.

For Ford, Bruce said the character uses alcohol to cope, and for Reagan, it strains her relationship with her daughter as she worries about politics and maintaining the perfect image.

"Maybe if they didn't try so hard to cover up the cracks, that things would have panned out better for them, that their relationships with their daughters would have, would have been better," Bruce said.

For Jones, her characters help others. Laura Bush is trying to get her mother-in-law, Barbara, to come in and pack for the campaign trail on the anniversary of Barbara's daughter's death. Rosalynn Carter is trying to care for her daughter, Amy.

Jones said one specific scene with Rosalynn and Amy is an example of the writer's "historical fantasia" and ability to push the envelope. In the scene, several wild things



MEGAN WALSH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Freshman Grace Santo (left), who plays Amy Carter, kills sophomore Jordyn Sutton, who plays Susan Ford, with a doll in rehearsal for a scene in "First Daughter Suite" in Scott Studios on April 16.

happen, including Jones' character getting turned into a duck and Amy killing someone with a doll.

Freshman music theatre major Grace Santo plays Amy. She said her 12-year-old character is sassy and funny; she acts as if she is on top of the world.

"She just wants big things, and she wants to be like her dad, because, I mean, he's the president of a whole country," Santo said. "She has big thoughts, just like he does."

The scene takes place in Amy's dream, though it is unclear at first, Santo said. She said committing to the craziness of the scene has helped her stay in the moment.

"I think it's just committing to the character, thinking everything you're doing is the most important thing, and not looking at it from an outside perspective," Santo said. "Because when you are just committed to the character, it feels real."

In Santo's scene, set while Jimmy Carter is president, the characters attempt to free Iranian hostages. Warren said she never imagined when the show was selected for Elon Performing Arts two years ago that the United States would be in conflict with Iran.

Warren said the cast has had several conversations about Iran and how it connects to the show, and how audiences today will see the topic differently than the original audiences.

"It's really interesting to be able to talk about that, to figure out how we feel," Warren said. "It's, of course, something we don't want to deal with, we don't want to be at war. We

don't want to see the suffering and things like that. We do want to understand sort of how did we get here, and what is the history behind it."

Bruce said she is interested in political science, and coming into rehearsal and learning the history of these conflicts has impacted her view of history and how it repeats itself.

"Sometimes we think that those things are really distant, like, 'Why do I need to learn about presidents?' Or, like, 'Why do I need to learn about history even?'" Bruce said. "And it's like we learn about history because it can help us make better decisions in the future."

With the dark themes of the story, Warren said she was surprised by how funny the show was when she saw the cast perform it for the first time. She said she hopes this show helps the audience see these women in a new light.

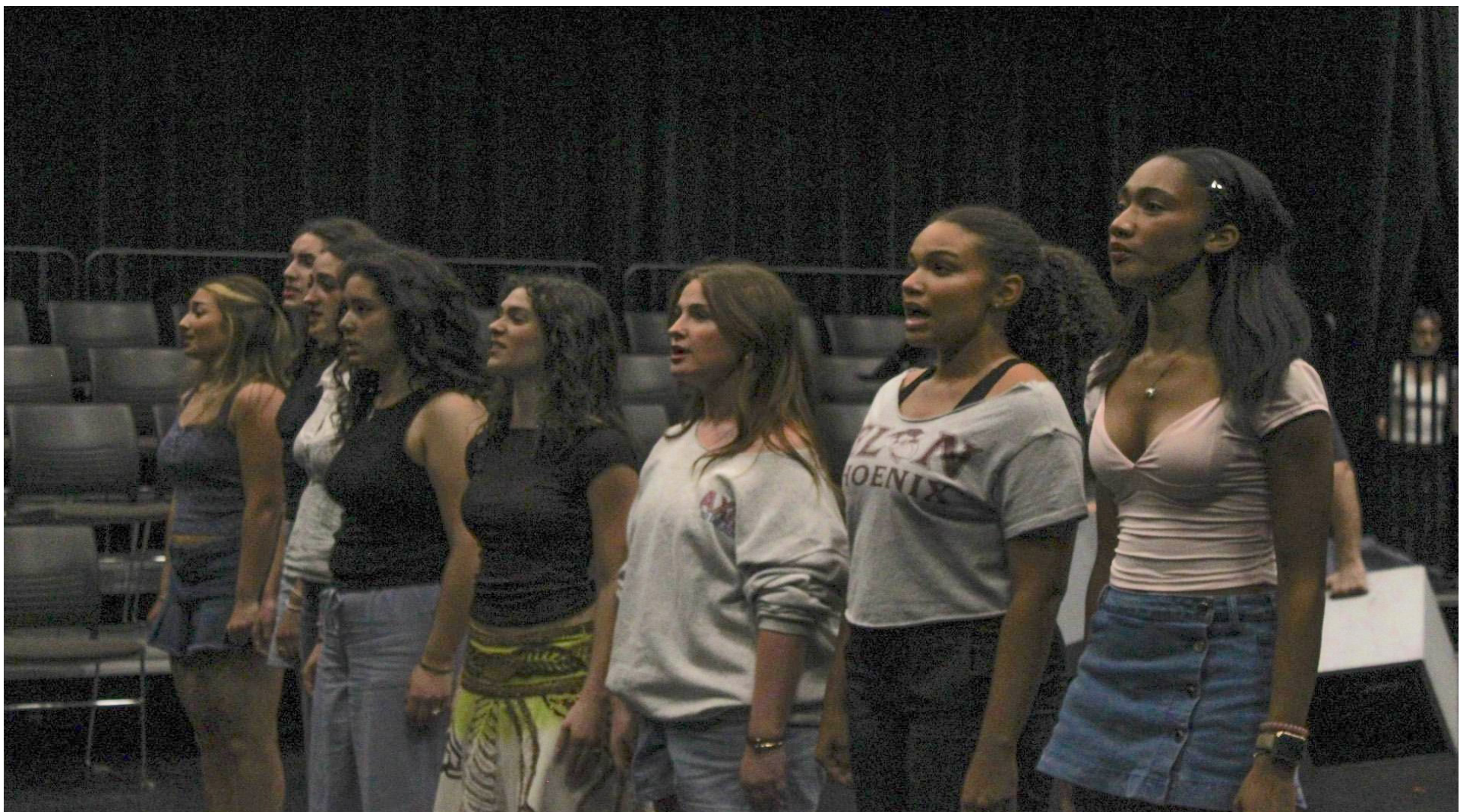
"I actually love that about it, even though it has a lot of darkness to it, and it goes there, and it really explores that, the difficulty of the relationships that we can have with our mothers," Warren said.

IF YOU GO

"First Daughter Suite" will run May 2 to 4 in Roberts Studio Theatre.

- 7:30 p.m. May 2
- 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. May 3
- 2 p.m. May 4

Tickets go on sale on April 24, on the Elon Performing Arts website. They are \$15 or free with an Elon ID.



MEGAN WALSH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The cast of "First Daughter Suite" rehearses the opening number of the show in Scott Studios on April 16.

Is AI making us smarter — or just better at looking smart?



A photo illustration of a student using ChatGPT to brainstorm ideas for a homework assignment.

SARAH T. MOORE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Tom Arcaro
Guest Columnist
Department of Sociology and Anthropology

WHEN STUDENTS USE GENERATIVE artificial intelligence to write papers, many professors worry: Are we watching the death of critical thinking?

It's a fair question. But it's also not a new one.

Over 2,000 years ago, Plato worried that writing itself would make people forget how to think. If ideas could be written down, why bother remembering them? Writing, he argued, would create the illusion of knowledge — people would seem wise without actually understanding anything.

Sound familiar?

Today's concerns about AI echo Plato almost exactly. Critics argue that tools such as ChatGPT weaken thinking, encourage shortcuts and produce polished but shallow work. And yes — AI can absolutely be used that way.

But here's the deeper point: Every major shift in how humans process knowledge has sparked the same fear.

Writing didn't destroy thinking — it made philosophy, science and law possible. The printing press didn't ruin intellectual life — it expanded access to ideas (even as it also spread propaganda). Calculators didn't end math — they allowed us to focus on more complex problems.

Each time, something was lost. But something new was gained.

So the real question isn't whether AI is "good" or "bad." It's how we use it — and who benefits.

This is where things get more serious.

AI is not neutral. It reflects the world it's trained on, including its biases and inequalities. It tends to reproduce dominant voices while marginalizing others. It gives an advantage to those who

already have access to technology and know how to use it well.

In other words, AI doesn't just change how we learn — it can reinforce existing inequalities in who gets to know and who gets to be heard.

But that's not the end of the story.

There's another possibility — one that educators like Paulo Freire would recognize. What if AI isn't a shortcut around thinking, but a tool for deeper thinking?

Imagine using AI to generate competing arguments on an issue, identify hidden assumptions or analyze whose interests those arguments serve.

In that kind of classroom, AI isn't doing the thinking for students — it's pushing them to think harder.

Or imagine a student who can't afford tutoring using AI to learn difficult material. Or a professor using AI to handle routine tasks so they can spend more time actually engaging with students.

These are real possibilities. But they won't happen automatically.

They depend on us — students and faculty — deciding that education is about more than producing polished assignments. It's about developing critical awareness, asking hard questions and learning to see the world more clearly.

No AI can do that for you.

You can use AI to write an essay. But it can't give you that moment when something clicks — when you realize that what you thought was "obvious" is actually shaped by culture, power and perspective.

That moment — the moment of real learning — is human.

So don't ask whether AI will replace thinking. Ask whether you're using it to avoid thinking — or to push yourself further.

The future of education isn't about banning AI or blindly embracing it. It's about learning how to use it without losing what matters most.

Because in the end, the goal isn't just to sound smart.

It's to become a more thoughtful master of critical analysis.

Elon dance team wins 2 national titles



KATHAN GANDHI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon's dance team was honored at Elon's baseball game April 14 at Latham Park. Captain Bella Marrone delivered the game's opening pitch.

Coach said building confidence was key to success

Abigail Hines
Elon News Network

The Elon dance team huddled on stage with linked arms, waiting to hear their placement in Division I pom at the 2026 National Dance Association's College National Championships. When the announcer proclaimed Elon champions, the dancers burst into cheers, realizing they'd secured Elon's first pom category win in program history.

The next day, they became two-time national champions with a first place finish in Division I hip hop.

Coming into the competition, their eyes were set on that first place trophy. Senior co-captain Bella Marrone said she remembered getting off the bus at Daytona

Beach with her team and thinking about the opportunity ahead of them.

"One of my teammates looked at me, and she was like, 'Can you imagine if we leave here with two rings?'" Marrone said. "It would be insane, but I just was like, 'We are so capable of doing that.'"

Head coach Elly Dirks spoke earlier this year about her attempts all season to build confidence in her dancers leading up to the national competition. After the competition concluded, Dirks said the team's mindset before going on stage made all the difference.

Dirks recalled taking time during rehearsals to recite positive affirmations and instill belief in her dancers. When talking with her team before their performance, Dirks said the dancers felt ready to take the stage.

"That continued throughout the week and really showed for itself on stage," Dirks said. "I had parents and other fans

there and other teams even just saying how they demanded the stage."

At the 2025 competition, the dance team placed second in pom to Stephen F. Austin State University, a powerhouse in the pom category. Elon's win this year stopped SFASU from winning its 20th national title.

"Going against those just phenomenal teams and ones who are just legends in the pom category and now being up there with them, it was an incredible feeling," Dirks said.

Senior co-captain Olivia Ferranola said ending the season with two national titles was the perfect way to finish her time on the Elon dance team.

"Knowing I did everything I could and I put all four years into this moment, I was satisfied walking off, knowing that this was how I was going to end my chapter," Ferranola said.

The dance team was welcomed back to

campus on April 12 by friends, family and alumni. Ferranola said the recognition from the community meant a lot for the dancers.

"When you're in the competition, you're surrounded by people that are winning left and right," Ferranola said. "Coming back here, where you're celebrated for your win, representing your school, it means more to us to be recognized here than it does there. So I think coming back and having everyone there celebrating us when we got off the bus was just truly heartwarming."

The dancers were also honored at the Elon baseball game against Winthrop University on April 14, where Marrone was selected to deliver a ceremonial first pitch.

Dirks said the team's success this year has sparked a drive to top what she's already accomplished.

"Let's go set some more records," Dirks said.

Rising defensive mind joins football coaching staff

Former Maine assistant strives to develop players while strengthening Phoenix defense

Riley Hale
Elon News Network

Elon has hired experienced defensive coach Jalen Hairston to lead its secondary. Hairston comes to Elon after many years of success in Division II football.

He joins the Phoenix coaching staff after spending the past two seasons as the defensive backs coach for the University of Maine. While there, he also served as the safeties coach and defensive passing game coordinator for the Black Bears. Before he was a coach, Hairston played three seasons with the University of Charleston from 2015-2018.

This past season, Hairston helped lead Maine to a six-game winning streak, during which his defense allowed 14 points or fewer in four of those six games. He previously served as the defensive coordinator, safeties, and linebackers coach at his alma mater for

the 2022 and 2023 seasons.

In the 2023 season, Hairston helped the Charleston Golden Eagles to a 10-2 record, as well as their first NCAA Division II playoff win in school history.

Along with that great accomplishment, his defense ranked first in Division II in defensive touchdowns, 18th in third-down percentage, 29th in interceptions, and 30th in sacks.

Hairston said that he would always run into Elon fans while recruiting. When Maine came to play the Phoenix in football last season, he said he fell in love with the atmosphere. So when the Virginia native was offered to join Elon's coaching staff, he said he thought it was a "no-brainer" from both a professional and family standpoint.

Hairston grew up only an hour away from Elon in Martinsville, Virginia. Hairston said he chose to come to Elon despite growing up in Virginia because he wanted to learn more about Elon athletics.

Hairston said the opportunities to work hands-on with the team to formulate ideas and incorporate philosophies were a huge part of the appeal.

"I have been able to develop my guys

as people academically, athletically, and socially on and off the field," Hairston said.

Hairston has a philosophy and a concept named "EAT." The "E" stands for effort: how much effort are one is willing to put into being successful. Effort can be controlled based on what one puts effort into. Effort is also connected to attitude and mentality, according to Hairston.

The "A" stands for accountability: holding oneself accountable even when it's hard. Once one masters holding themselves accountable and doing even the little things, Hairston said they earn the right to be a leader and hold others accountable and be successful.

The "T" stands for trust: a reminder to trust coaches, teammates, and oneself.

Hairston said he aims to bring EAT to Elon — helping the Phoenix defense grow heading into next season.

HAIRSTON'S RESUME

2015-2018: Defensive back at University of Charleston

2022-23: Defensive coordinator, linebacker safeties coach at University of Charleston

2024-25: Defensive backs coach at University of Maine



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELON ATHLETICS

Jalen Hairston coaches Elon's secondary during practice.