

Director of bands leaves Elon University mid-summer

Music Education major was cut in 2025 due to low enrollment

Evan Cooper
Elon News Network

After three music department staff members left Elon University during the summer, KC Carter — a drum major for Elon's Fire of the Carolinas Marching Band — said they were concerned about the future of the band.

"In the beginning there was kind of radio silence, and there was a lot of confusion from everyone," Carter said. "My co-drum major, Alana Driver, she's been my rock but we were talking to each other a lot and being like 'What's going on? What do we do? Is the band even still happening?'"

Jonathan Poquette served as the director of bands since 2019, but he left Elon University over the summer. Poquette's last day at Elon was July 3. According to Poquette's LinkedIn profile, he is now the director of instrumental studies at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas.

Poquette did not respond to ENN's request for comment.

The College of Arts and Sciences voted on October 9, 2025 to cut the Music Education program due to low enrollment. Students currently enrolled in the program will be allowed to finish their degree. Students who were interested in this major are encouraged to explore a degree in music performance or music in liberal arts.

According to the Spring 2026 Registrar's Report, only two students were enrolled as music education majors. That same year 15 students majored in music performance and 21 majored in music in liberal arts. Enrollment in music education has been low. The Spring 2026 Registrar's Report reports that six students were enrolled in music education in 2025 and 2024. The last time 20 or more students were



KATRINA HOLTZ | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon's Fire of the Carolinas Marching Band marches into East Neighborhood during Move-In Day on Aug. 21.

enrolled in music education was 2011.

The Department of Music hired Danny Frye as interim director of bands; his first official day at Elon was Aug. 10. Allison Wente, chair of the music department, said Frye was chosen to fill the role because of his accomplishments as High Point University's director of athletic bands. He founded the first marching band at HPU and increased the number of students in band programs.

"We were very fortunate that he was here and able to step in, and take over really late in the game," Wente said.

Alana Driver, a drum major in Elon's Fire of the Carolinas Marching Band, didn't know any marching band members enrolled in Music

Education, and was surprised by Poquette's departure since he was very involved with the band.

"That has been challenging because he does a lot of stuff behind the scenes that we didn't really think about," Driver said. "And so when he left so unexpectedly it's like 'OK, who's doing all of that prep work?'"

Driver said that Frye has been very communicative and responsive with student leadership in band, and that she is looking forward to continuing to work with him.

The Department of Music lost other staff members before the start of the 2026-27 school year, including a drumline instructor, and the assistant director of bands.

Despite the loss of staff, the Department of Music is still moving forward for the school year. Wente said that the department is now offering zero or one-credit options for ensembles, including jazz, wind and various pop ensembles. Students can learn more about these ensembles through OnTrack.

Carter said that even though they were worried about the situation at the start, the Department of Music and the marching band are both optimistic about the year ahead with Frye.

"We have a lot of talented people, and that's really what it's about," Carter said. "It's about the team, it's the fact that we are there together that will make it great."

Elon continues sustainable water practices during drought

Elon University encourages water conservation efforts

Alice Morrissey
Elon News Network

Alamance County is experiencing an especially dry summer, causing several towns throughout the county to issue severe drought warnings and implement Stage 1 water conservation efforts. Although rain in recent weeks has helped ease the harsh conditions, Burlington and town of Elon officials continue to call on residents to practice responsible water use.

As students at Elon University settle back on campus for the start of fall classes, the university's office of sustainability is encouraging students to support the ongoing water conservation efforts.

"It's such an important part of our daily lives," said Kelly Harer, associate director of sustainability for education and outreach. "But until the water supply is threatened, you don't really think about it."

Currently, about 70% of Alamance County, including Elon is in a moderate drought while the rest is in a severe drought. The drought statewide has lasted for about 10 months.

Harer said educating students about water conservation across campus is an

important part of her job, hosting several events throughout the year to highlight sustainability. She said anyone who cares about equity and equality should also care about water conservation and work toward creating sustainable everyday practices.

According to Harer, one of the largest sources of water consumption for the average Elon student is long showers. She said this is an easy way for students to reduce their water use.

"Pick your favorite three- or five-minute songs, and you should be able to do everything you need to do in the shower in that amount of time," Harer said.

Harer also highlighted the low-flow systems installed throughout many campus buildings that aid in water conservation, specifically showerheads and faucets that use less water than typical fixtures.

She also pointed to one of Elon University's biggest uses of water: landscaping. She said the university works to maintain the greenery on campus while incorporating sustainable practices.

Elon's landscaping team uses an automatic irrigation system that works to conserve water for gardening and other landscaping needs.

"We are big advocates for water conservation here at Elon," said Scott Stevens, director of landscaping and transportation.

According to Stevens, each "bed," or

designated planting area, requires about 1 inch of water per week during the summer months to remain healthy, and the campus is made up of thousands of beds.

The university's sprinkler system is also digitized to account for rainfall, preventing the overwatering or underwatering of plants across campus. Elon relies heavily on its own water features for landscaping needs. About 85% of the water used for sprinklers and flower maintenance comes from the university's irrigation lakes: Lake Mary Nell, Lake Verona and South Campus Lake.

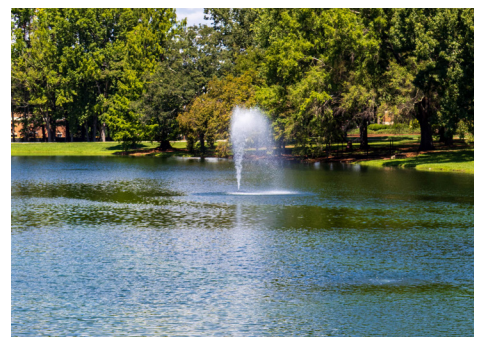
Stevens said he is aware of the drought conditions and has kept up with water restrictions across the state. However, because of Elon's irrigation system and water supply, little has changed in the university's watering practices after local towns announced Stage 1 water conservation measures.

While local reservoirs are experiencing low capacity levels, Elon's irrigation lakes have remained well supplied throughout the dry months due to recaptured stormwater and parking lot runoff, according to Stevens.

Stevens said that he and his team have an unconventional method of measuring the water supply.

"If you look at the bricks in Lake Mary Nell, you can see the water levels," Stevens said.

Stevens said that at the peak of the drought in June, about three bricks were visible along



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Much of the water used for Elon University's sprinklers and flower maintenance comes from the Elon's irrigation lakes: Lake Mary Nell, Lake Verona and South Campus Lake.

the lake's edge. Now, the water level has risen to the point that only one brick is visible.

If drought conditions continue to worsen and begin to affect water supplies, Stevens said the landscaping team would prioritize watering athletic fields and flower beds.

Harer said that although nothing is enforced with current drought conditions, she recommends that community members be mindful of their water and energy usage upon moving in.

"It's the offices of sustainability's job to make campus more sustainable operationally and to educate," Harer says. "But it's up to the students, staff and faculty to implement changes as they are able to."



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THE PENDULUM

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CORRECTIONS

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

Dear reader,

Thank you for picking up a copy of The Pendulum, Elon News Network's weekly newspaper. My name is Charlotte Pfabe and I am the executive director of Elon News Network, Elon University's student-run news organization.

The Pendulum, which hits shelves every Wednesday morning, is just one way we get the news to the public. ENN Tonight, our 30-minute live broadcast airs Monday nights at 6 p.m., and our digital news show, ENN On Air, is produced on Thursday evenings. ENN also publishes content daily on ElonNewsNetwork.com, including breaking news updates and investigative stories.

Our newsroom aims to serve the Elon and greater-Alamance communities with coverage that is fair, accurate and comprehensive. The newsroom is student-led, with much of our team volunteering their time to cover stories across our community.

By picking up a copy of The Pendulum, you are supporting the hundreds of hours our reporters, editors, designers, photographers and analysts put into producing our content. In an ever-changing media landscape, your support reminds our team that journalism is important and democracy thrives when the press is free.

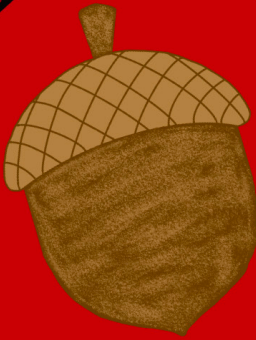
To the communities we cover, thank you for allowing us to help tell your stories. And to you, the reader, thank you for taking time in today's busy world to keep yourself informed and support student media.

With excitement and anticipation for what the year holds,

Charlotte Pfabe



Letter from the
Executive Director



Students, community reflect on death of performing arts professor

Memorial service to be held Sept. 11

Evan Cooper
Elon News Network

Longtime Elon University Performing Arts professor Carroll "Chip" Johnson died on Aug. 11, 2026, according to his obituary from Forbis & Dick Funeral Service.

Johnson graduated from Rollins College with a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Arts, and received a Master of Fine Arts in Acting and Directing from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Johnson was an active member of the Elon performing arts department, working as an adjunct professor of theatre for nearly 30 years. He performed in musical theatre productions at Elon in roles including The Starkeeper in "Carousel," Grandpa in "Ragtime," and Jekyll's Father in "Jekyll & Hyde."

The Elon Department of Performing Arts published an Instagram post Aug. 18, mourning Johnson's death and remembering his contributions to the department.

"With his gentle, easy-going manner and his wonderful sense of humor, Chip was a beloved teacher and colleague in the Department of Performing Arts for many years," the Elon Department of Performing Arts said in an Aug. 18 Instagram post.

Johnson also performed at the Triad Stage in Greensboro, the International Black Theatre Festival and North Carolina Black Repertory Company. In a statement to Elon News Network, NC Black Rep said Johnson had a deep respect and passion for acting that allowed

him to deeply connect with the audience.

"From the moment Chip stepped into the room, he raised the professionalism and spirit of a project," NC Black Rep said in a statement to Elon News Network. "The NC Black Rep family is honored to have known and worked with him and blessed to have called him a friend."

Johnson taught "Acting for Non-Majors" at Elon University, an acting class open to all students. Elon alumni Caleb Martin '24 said that he took Johnson's class at a time when he wasn't sure he wanted to continue at Elon, but Johnson's class made him realize his passion for acting and lead to him majoring in Cinema and Television Arts.

"With his teachings I learned a lot, and he noticed something in me that I didn't notice," Martin said. "He pulled me aside one time and he was like 'Caleb, I really think you have something here. You're really good with expressing yourself,' and I'd never heard that before."

Junior Amalia Zucker took "Acting for Non-Majors" as a freshman without a large background in acting. Zucker said that Johnson's love for theatre strengthened the environment of the class and made the experience a lasting memory.

"You could tell based on the way he conducted the class that his appreciation for his craft was non-negotiable," Zucker said. "He wanted people who were there to be taking it as seriously as he took it."

Zucker recounted when she forgot the words to a monologue in class, Johnson didn't ask her to start over like other professors might



COURTESY OF ELON UNIVERSITY PERFORMING ARTS DEPARTMENT
Chip Johnson worked in Elon University's performing arts department for nearly 30 years.

have, but instead urged her to continue in the moment.

"I had to decide then whether I was going to man up and finish out what I started or whether I was going to bail out and sit down," Zucker said. "I use the story in job interviews all the time because it really was a 'The show must go on' situation, where I finally understood what that meant."

Martin said that since Johnson's teachings impacted his life so much, it was hard to come to terms with the news of his death.

"It really sucks, but he lives on through the people that he has affected, and everything he taught me is still within me today," Martin said.

A memorial service will be held at 11 a.m. on Sept. 11 at Christ United Methodist Church in Greensboro.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Elon University's class of 2030 attends Convocation Under the Oaks Aug. 22. During the ceremony, freshmen received acorns and listened to advice from members of Elon leadership.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Elon University senior forward/midfielder Martin Kozak controls the ball, guarding it from Virginia Military Institute sophomore midfielder Sam Dowdy during their match Aug. 20 at Rudd Field. This 3-0 victory for the Phoenix marks its 11th consecutive win.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Elon University new student orientation leaders and Residence Life staff help move students in on Move-In Day on Aug. 21.



VENUS SOTO CASTANEDA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Vice President for Inclusive Excellence Randy Williams and Vice President of Student Life Jon Dooley introduce the class of 2030 and transfer students during Convocation Under the Oaks on Aug. 22. "The fastest way through isn't gritting your teeth by yourself in your room," Dooley said during the ceremony. "It's relying on people sitting around you right now, the ones you haven't met yet."



VENUS SOTO CASTANEDA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Families select food at the family send-off picnic Aug. 22. The picnic gave families a chance to spend time together following Move-In Day and New Student Orientation. Freshman Hannah Hubbell said her nerves have faded. "Even though this is an unknown, I am confident in myself, and I know what I am doing," Hubbell said.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Elon University students take part in activities during Late Night Elon on Aug. 21 in Moseley Center. The event featured several activities, such as indoor mini golf and painting Elon "E's." Freshman Logan Buckley said he has been enjoying his time at Elon so far. "I'm meeting new people, I'm doing a bunch of extracurriculars, I'm eating good food and I'm having a lot of fun."

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Gov. Stein vetoes controversial elections reform bill

Gov. Josh Stein recently vetoed House Bill 958, which aimed to reduce early voting periods for primaries and special elections, among several other elections reforms.

Bill would shorten early voting periods, require post-election audits

Evan Cooper
Elon News Network

Gov. Josh Stein vetoed a sweeping elections reform bill that would reduce early voting days and expand the state auditor’s authority in elections. The legislation now heads back to the state House of Representatives.

House Bill 958 includes measures to reduce early voting periods for primaries and special elections from 17 days to 10 days, allow precinct officials to be removed by county boards on the day of an election and require the state auditor to conduct post-election audits of county election systems. Gov. Stein vetoed the bill Aug. 17.

The state auditor was previously given more authority over elections in Senate Bill 382, a Hurricane Helene relief bill that transferred control of the state Board of Elections from the governor to the state auditor.

Rebekah Whilden — the executive director of left-leaning advocacy group and think tank Carolina Forward — said

the group celebrates Gov. Stein’s veto and will continue urging lawmakers to vote no on HB 958.

“Our law should make things easier for North Carolinians, like expanding early voting and making sure that we’re not taking away those days,” Whilden said. “We don’t need to be creating new hurdles that make it harder to cast a ballot and to have it counted, and HB 958 moved us in the wrong direction of that.”

The legislation was voted for along party lines in the state House of Representatives and Senate — only Republicans voted in favor of HB 958. Republicans hold a three-fifths majority in the Senate, but are one seat short of a three-fifths majority in the House. Gov. Stein’s veto could stand unless Democrats or unaffiliated legislators side with Republicans. The General Assembly does not plan to vote again until after the midterm election.

Republicans said HB 958 would make elections more secure and efficient, while Democrats accused GOP lawmakers of attempting to stay in power ahead of the 2026 midterm.

Sam Hayes — a Republican and the executive director of the N.C. Board of Elections — issued a statement following Gov. Stein’s veto, saying that his office

supports the changes presented in the bill and hopes the General Assembly will revisit it later in the year.

“The State Board’s responsibility is to ensure that our voter rolls are accurate and that every eligible voter can participate while maintaining the security and integrity of our elections,” Hayes said in a statement. “We welcome the opportunity to work with legislators on thoughtful, practical improvements that strengthen those goals.”

The Alamance County Board of Elections was unavailable for an interview, but sent a statement to Elon News Network saying the bill would not impact the midterm election in November.

“Shorter early voting days is the main impact that voters would see,” the Alamance County Board of Elections said in a statement. “N.C. additionally offers no excuse-vote-by-mail and polls are open on election day from 6:30 am to 7:30 pm.”

A study published by the Elon University Poll on Aug. 12 found that while 63% of N.C. voters are somewhat or very confident this year’s election process will be fair, there is a division between parties. Thirty-three percent of Democrats said they are very confident, compared to 23% of Republicans. Twenty-

one percent of Republicans said they were only a little confident, compared to 15% of Democrats.

Jason Husser — director of the Elon University Poll — said that according to the study, Republican voters are more likely to stand behind a measure like this. The Elon Poll found 64% of Republicans saw voter fraud as a major problem compared to 23% of Democrats.

“If you’re in the group of folks that say it’s not a problem at all, then it just looks like these are pieces of legislation set up to favor one party or another,” Husser said. “So there are definitely two different perceptions here.”

Other measures proposing changes to election systems have been introduced in the General Assembly. House Bill 834 extends the time period for correcting voter registration forms from three business days to five and allows country boards to correct registration for deceased voters. Gov. Stein signed the bill into law on Aug. 11.

North Carolina voters will vote on a new amendment to the state Constitution in November, requiring all voters to present photo identification before voting and eliminating previous exceptions for mail-in voting.

ENN FILE PHOTO

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Elon's Common Reading looks beyond the basketball court

Book will introduce students to conversations about athletics, identity, community

Elissa Leka
Elon News Network

For some students, a book about basketball might sound like an unlikely Common Reading. For Elon's incoming class, however, poet and essayist Hanif Abdurraqib's "There's Always This Year: On Basketball and Ascension" could offer a different path into conversations about identity, community and belonging as first-year students begin their college journey this semester.

Associate Director of the Common Reading Paula Patch said the common reading is selected a year in advance because the process of reaching a decision and getting approval takes time. The book is a non-fiction essay collection and memoir framing Abdurraqib's life in '90s Columbus, Ohio, to explore the tensions that come with success and the expectation of it. The book's blurb described this time as a "golden era" for basketball, with legend LeBron James becoming Abdurraqib's celebrity role model.

Every spring, the committee chooses a book from a selection of around 20 novels. The committee considers factors such as length, difficulty and cultural relevance, though Patch said that wasn't her only consideration when choosing Abdurraqib's book.

"I like it when I learn something, but I really like it when it makes me feel something," Patch said. "This book was a good 'feel' book."

Patch said the committee considers several factors when selecting the book, including its length, the cost of bringing the author to campus and whether its themes can resonate with Elon's diverse student population. Patch said the committee also looks for ways to connect the book to organizations and events on campus.

Last year, Patch said students read "First Gen," which connected to the school's office for First Gen students.

"It's doing really big things in the world," Patch said. "We have a lot of students who have some really cool

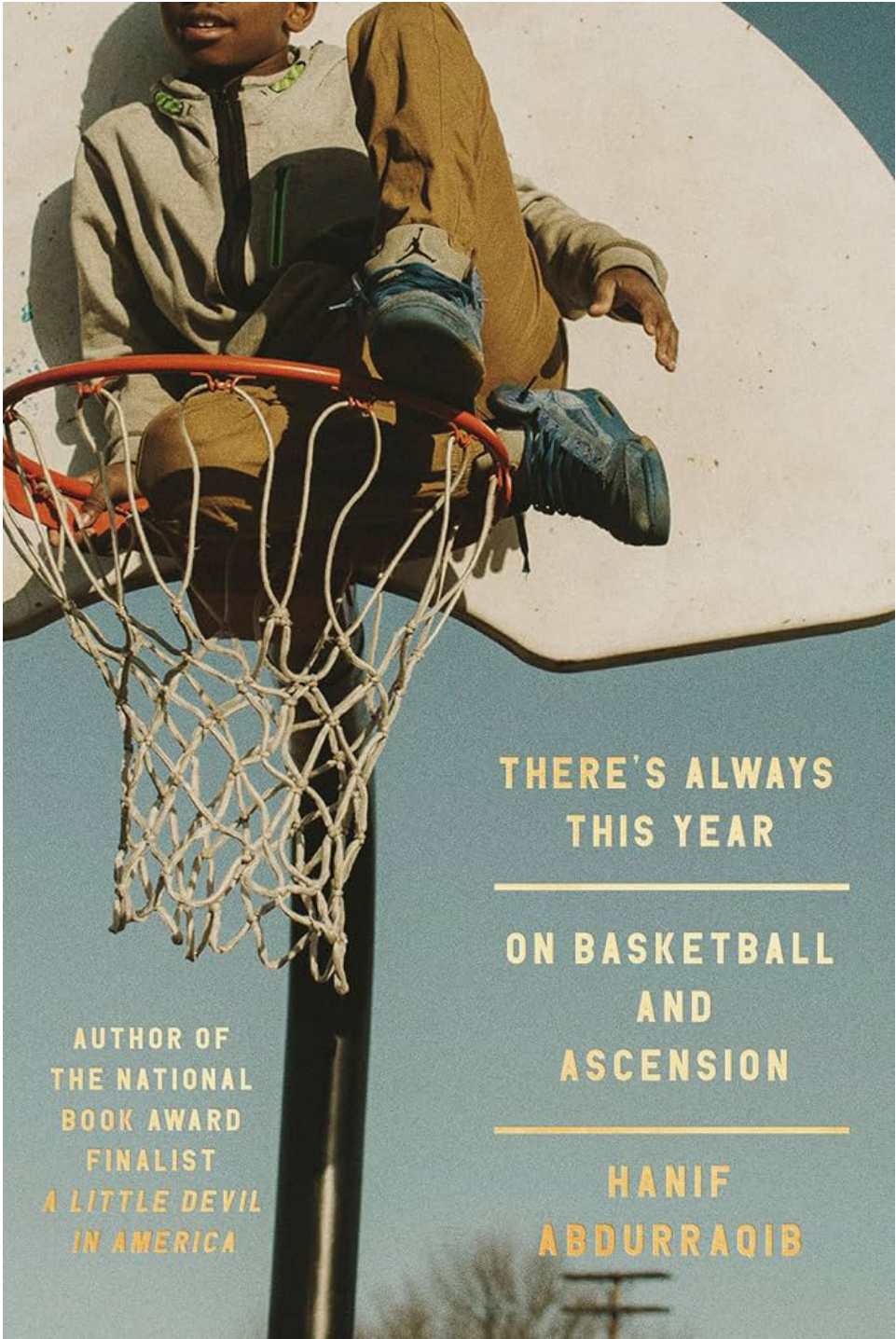


PHOTO COURTESY OF ABDURRAQIB.COM

stories to tell."

This year, Patch said the book will draw focus to Elon's athletics department, which is undergoing a rebrand with its new visual identity and mascot that was revealed at College Coffee Aug 25.

"We have really wonderful student-athletes," Patch said, "But we kind of

ignore them as part of the academic experience. They're a huge part of the academic experience."

Assistant wDirector of Academic Support and Student Experiences Cole Henderson said the book presents an opportunity for athletes at Elon to find some enjoyment in reading.

"I know in the past our student population hasn't really taken much of an interest in the common reading, but since Hanif has his sports background and the book being about basketball, I've found that student-athletes would definitely take a liking to the book," Henderson said.

Henderson said the book invites student-athletes to reflect on what makes up their identities.

"It's important for our student-athletes to know that their sport is what they do and not necessarily who they are," Henderson said.

Beyond student-athletes, Patch said the book will be a way for all Elon students to find some common ground.

"The classroom is a big space where you learn how to be part of the community and have this safe space to do it," Patch said.

Though she said she doesn't expect students to stop each other on campus to solely talk about the book, she hopes that they can find some connections when talking about it in class. Patch said she will be integrating the book's themes about home into her own English 1010 class.

"I really love to talk about how where we're from and where we are really shapes our identities and home," Patch said.

Patch said she plans on highlighting Abdurraqib's love for LeBron James in her own classroom to emphasize how local heroes shape someone's interests and values.

"I grew up in North Carolina. Michael Jordan is like is a huge part of my life," Patch said. "He was a reason why I chose to go to the University of North Carolina."

Patch said this can apply to non-celebrities as well. She said the mentors and peers students find on campus are some of the strongest influences and guides to figuring out life.

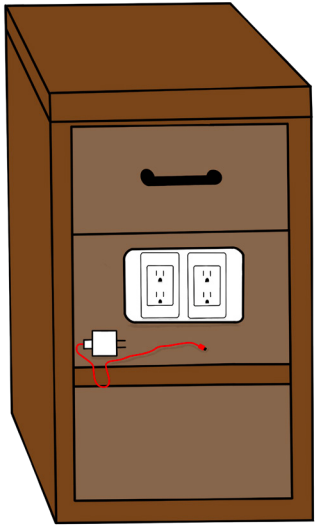
"Whether it's peers or professors or staff or whatever, who are going to be the people who you can go to and who can help you figure out your next steps?" Patch said.

Henderson said those conversations about belonging extend beyond the classroom and into students' transition to college.

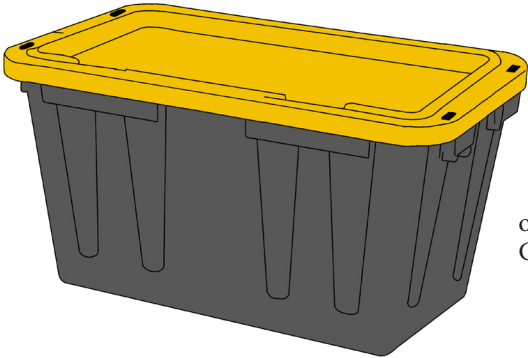
"The big takeaways for our students to know is where home is," Henderson said. "And maybe, that could be Elon for them."

Freshman essentials

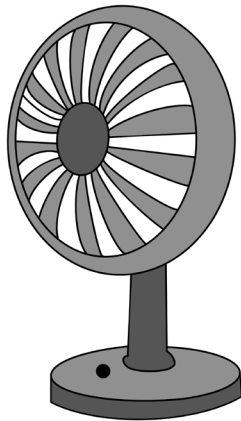
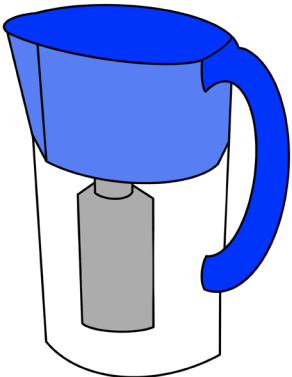
During move-in, our reporters asked new students what the most essential items they brought were. Here were their answers:



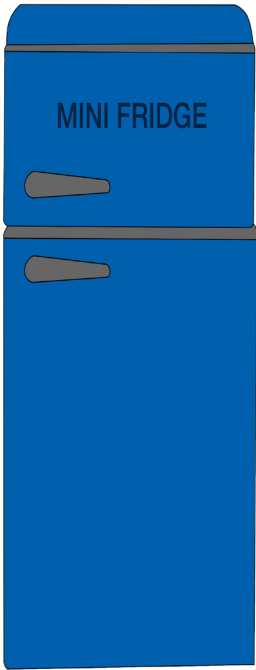
"I have this nightstand that has a plug-in, and you can plug it into the wall, and then I can plug my phone into the nightstand to let it charge. That seems like it'll be the best thing ever," freshman Morgan Siegel said.



"My stuffed animals. That was probably one of my main things I needed," freshman Cassie Corbett said.



"I definitely wanted a fan. I've heard those are pretty useful. Even though you have AC here, they said it still gets pretty warm," freshman John Teduits said.



Student finds her community 3,000 miles away from home



EMMA PERMAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Jayne Gilchrist embraces her mom after settling into her new dorm Aug. 21. Gilchrist, who is from Santa Clara, California, is an incoming freshman at Elon University.

Small reminders of home ease transition into first year at Elon

Emma Perman
Special Events Coordinator

For many freshmen, moving into college meant packing the practical things like clothes, toiletries and pictures of family and friends; to make an unfamiliar room feel a little more like home.

For Jayne Gilchrist, that also meant making room for her childhood stuffed animal and a pair of cowboy boots.

“This is Buddy,” Gilchrist said, holding her stuffed animal close. “This is absolutely a necessity. I’ve had him since before I can even remember. Like, definitely needed to come from home.”

The small pieces of home mattered the most for Gilchrist, who traveled nearly 3,000 miles from Santa Clara, California, to begin her first year at Elon University. Her belongings may have made the trip with her, but the move meant leaving people, places and communities she had known her entire life.

“It was very terrifying,” Gilchrist said before arriving at Elon. “All my belongings are in the hotel room right now. It’s scary.”

Now, after her first few days on campus, that initial fear is beginning to become familiarity. Part of that transition has come from the people she has met and the communities Elon has built into campus life. Gilchrist is part of the Service Living-Learning Community and the Teaching Fellows program. According to Gilchrist, these programs have given her something to look forward to before she even arrived in North Carolina - a place to belong.

At Elon, LLCs bring students with shared interest, academic goals or passions together in residential communities.

According to the Elon LLC website, the communities are designed to connect residential life with learning. Students can attend programs, participate in service opportunities, take courses together and interact with faculty and staff mentors who share their interests. Elon currently offers LLCs across its residential neighborhoods including creative arts, business, health sciences and communications.

The idea is that a student’s education

does not stop when they leave the classroom, according to the Elon LLC website. For a first-year student, it can also mean that the transition to college does not have to happen alone. According to Gilchrist, this was particularly important.

“Back at home, I was really involved in service, volunteer hours, stuff like that,” Gilchrist said. “I was in Girl Scouts, so being a part of that community felt like home, giving back.”

This led her to the Service LLC in Elon’s East Neighborhood, looking for a way to continue that part of herself. Without the

to support you. They’re excited to answer questions. Upperclassmen, staff, faculty, everybody is just here and ready to help.”

Gilchrist is also entering Elon with another built-in community.

She is a member of the Elon Teaching Fellows program, a four-year program for students interested in education and preparing for careers as teachers and education leaders.

“It’s so much fun to meet all these girls who are also super passionate about educating and becoming the teachers of tomorrow,” Gilchrist said.



EMMA PERMAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Jayne Gilchrist packs her bag for the first day of classes Aug. 24.

network she had at home, the structure provided has also mattered.

“Questions are definitely getting answered,” Gilchrist said. “If you have questions, I feel like everyone here is ready

Those relationships Gilchrist has started to build have given her another group of people who understand why she came to Elon and what she hopes to do after she leaves.

“It’s just like there’s this built-in sense of family and community that you already have mentors and people that are already there to help and support you,” Gilchrist said. “I’m not coming in completely fresh.”

Teaching Fellows have opportunities for study abroad experiences and was one of the aspects that stood out to Gilchrist when she was considering the program.

“They were encouraging to take all the classes and be really hands on and also really encouraging about studying abroad,” Gilchrist said. “That’s something I’m really excited about.”

While these opportunities with the program are still a while away, she said she is focusing on learning the people around her and figuring out how she fits into the Elon community.

Gilchrist said this process has not been entirely easy, she expects to miss the beach and her family.

Gilchrist is the first child in her family to go to college, with a younger brother two years behind. Her parents, she said, will have to adjust to having only one child at home.

When her parents left Elon during Orientation Weekend, the reality of the distance became more immediate.

“I don’t think I’ve seen my dad cry,” Gilchrist said. “I’m the first born, first person to go to college in my family. So then leaving was just like, ‘You got out, you made it, right? You’re here.’”

Gilchrist said she plans to keep in touch through letters and keep pictures of family close by, but the first days at Elon have also given her new things to look forward to.

“Everyone here is so much nicer than people in LA,” Gilchrist said. “Everyone’s welcoming and nice, and my roommate’s amazing, so I’m really excited.”

At New Student Convocation, she said the ceremony gave her a glimpse of the ending that is still four years away and a nice bookend to the journey she just started. Gilchrist’s acorn that she received during the ceremony sits on her desk, a small reminder of growth she hopes to experience during her time at Elon.

“It is emotional, but I’m ready to take the next step,” Gilchrist said.

Gilchrist said she still has four years to figure out exactly who she will become and where she belongs.

New Phoenix, new look

Elon Athletics rolls out redesigned brand

Students react to changes in sports identity, mascot

Kathan Gandhi
Sports Editor

As Elon Athletics rolls out its new logo and mascot, reactions across campus have been mixed. Some students are praising the sleeker design while others mourn the mascot's old edge.

The university's primary athletics logo now features the monogram 'E' and the Elon wordmark. The monogram was originally introduced across the broader university brand in 2016 and is now being extended to athletics to create a more direct visual connection between the department and the rest of the school.

"Our goal was to create a clearer and more unified identity for Elon Athletics," Director of Athletics Jenn Strawley said in an Elon Athletics press release. "Making the monogram 'E' and Elon wordmark our primary marks strengthens our connection to the university."

The 'E' is also rooted in history. Elon's Phoenix has changed twice before; the university retired the Fightin' Christians nickname and introduced the Phoenix in 2000, then refreshed the Phoenix logo again in 2016.

Now, athletics is introducing a third version of the Phoenix, one that nods to those past designs — including a gold sweater and monogram "E" that reference the original Fightin' Christians uniform, along with a sharper, forward-leaning stance and flame details on the shoes.

The rebrand also arrives on the heels of a strong fundraising year for the department. According to Elon's fiscal year 2025 audited financial report, Phoenix fans contributed more than \$2.3 million in annual operating support, a total the university described as a record. That gift total was part of nearly \$6 million Elon Athletics received across unrestricted funds, sport-specific initiatives, capital projects and endowments during the year.

The financial report ties the rebrand's timing to a broader shift for the department, noting the recent adoption of a new five-year strategic plan for athletics called "Phoenix Rising." Gerrit Van Genderen, associate athletics director for strategic communications at Elon University, did not respond to Elon



KATHAN GANDHI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon Athletics unveiled its new mascot on Aug. 17. The new mascot head branding hangs from a flag under the oaks Aug. 23.

News Network's request for the total cost of the rebrand.

The rollout won't happen all at once. Elon Athletics said sport-specific versions of the Phoenix are still in development and will arrive in phases throughout the 2026-27 academic year, alongside updated uniforms, facility signage and merchandise.

For some students, the change is an upgrade. Freshman McKenna Jewell, who plays for the Elon women's lacrosse team, said she likes the new look. Fellow freshman Daniel Dudas agreed, pointing to the balance between tradition and refresh.

"The E is definitely a classic and definitely original. People know the Elon 'E,'" Dudas said. "But I think it's time for that new Phoenix."

Not everyone has been sold since the announcement of the switch. Freshman Scarlett Gilner, a teammate of Jewell's, said she's warming up to the change but still has a soft spot for the old design.

"I like the old one better, I think," Gilner

said. "But I'm getting used to it, and I think it's cute."

Freshman Geffen Sever said the new logo trades character for cleanliness.

"It's pretty clean, but I feel like the old one kind of had a little more aura to it," Sever said. "It looked like the Phoenix in motion. There was something a little more menacing about it."

Some commenters on Elon Athletics' social media posts announcing the rebrand compared the new mascot to the University of Delaware's Blue Hens — a program that left the Coastal Athletic Association, Elon's own conference, for Conference USA last year.

Sophomore Andrew Witter agreed, adding that the new mascot lost the aggression of the old one.

"I don't like it. Compared to the old one, this one's just more goofy," Witter said. "The old one was aggressive, you know, like a Phoenix. This one's just a rooster."

Some students were more blunt.

"It kind of looks like a fast food logo,"

freshman Stephanie Miskavage said. "It's really cartoonish."

But not all reactions have been critical. Where some see cartoonishness, others see charm. Sophomore Devon Tompkins said he's fond of the new mascot's face.

"I kind of mess with it. I like the 'Wocka Flocka Flame' on his head," Tompkins said. "It's definitely growing on me."

That sentiment was shared when the new physical mascot was unveiled at Elon's first College Coffee.

"I love it," sophomore Chris Mendez said after taking a photo with the mascot. "It definitely just matches everything. Just the whole restructuring and fixing up from what we had. So it's definitely an improvement."

Some fans were more vocal about their support.

"It really resembles our school — like the fire and the ashes. So I love his shoes," junior Ethan Perry said. "It reminds me of how we could be torn down to the bottom and rise up from the ashes, and now our mascot did too."

