

Elon prepares for federal DEI changes amid UNC repealing requirements

Chapel Hill, Elon grapple with federal expectations of higher education

Abigail Hobbs
Elon News Network

A memo was sent out to all University of North Carolina system chancellors announcing that all course requirements related to diversity, equity and inclusion taught at UNC System schools are suspended on Feb. 5.

President Donald Trump signed an executive order Jan. 21 titled “Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity,” or Executive Order 14173, which requires removing all diversity, equity and inclusion programs and requirements from federally funded organizations. This includes all universities, public and private, that accept federal aid, which includes Elon University.

If the UNC school system did not comply with the order, it would risk losing its federal funding for research, which makes up 13% of the system’s annual budget — about \$1.4 billion — according to Andrew Tripp, the UNC system’s senior vice president for legal affairs and general counsel, wrote in the Feb. 5

memo to the chancellors.

“Even though some form of additional federal guidance is expected, and the law in this area remains unsettled, the risk of jeopardizing over \$1.4B in critical federal research funding is simply too great to defer action,” Tripp wrote.

Right now, Elon’s advancing equity requirement in the Core Curriculum is in line with the executive order, according to Jessica Carew, Elon’s assistant director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Elon Core Curriculum. While she was unavailable for an interview, in a statement to Elon News Network, Carew wrote that she is unsure how the law will impact higher education, particularly at Elon, in the next few months.

“In the context of Elon’s curricular requirements, these are all directly in line with ‘supporting equality of opportunity,’ supporting ‘traditional American values of hard work, excellence, and individual achievement,’ and rejecting ‘illegal discrimination and preferences,’ each of which are concepts identified within Executive Order 14173,” Carew wrote.

Randy Williams, vice president for Inclusive Excellence, was not available for an interview and did not speak on the amount of federal

funding Elon receives or how it would impact the university but wrote a statement to Elon News Network.

“The Elon University leadership team monitors and discusses all executive orders, laws and regulations that have implications for higher education,” Williams wrote. “The leadership team examines each unique situation to understand the legal and regulatory requirements as they are proposed, changed or litigated.”

Alexandra Versace is a senior at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and is co-director of the Department of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for student government. She said students weren’t happy to hear about the removal of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility.

“I don’t agree with that. I’m not a fan of it. I don’t agree with the executive order of Trump removing federal funding from anything involving DEI, the removal of DEIA within the curriculum and having that as a requirement came as a shock to me,” Versace said. “It wasn’t something that I hadn’t expected at all.”

While her role typically involves meeting with administration and students, she anticipates hearing from students about how student government can help support

them with how they are feeling and what they need and bringing that to the administration. However, the requirement coming from a federal level makes finding a middle ground more complicated.

The classes are still being offered but not required for any general education or major-related curriculums. Chapel Hill’s Chancellor Lee Roberts and Provost Chris Clemens wrote in an email to UNC students Feb. 10 that the policy will not suspend current classes or change class content.

within its Making Connection curriculum for graduation, which will no longer be a requirement.

Versace said the U.S. diversity requirement was good for the school, but she is happy that the university will still be offering the course.

“It’s important to expose people to different information that they may not have chosen to receive themselves, but students are still able to take this curriculum,” Versace said. “If that’s something that they want to do, it’s just not something that can be forced for students to take.”

Elon professor of sociology Raj Ghoshal has been teaching about inequality for 15 years and currently teaches SOC3410: Racism & Race in the U.S., which counts as an AER. He said the repeal of the requirement at UNC is upsetting, especially as it is due to a federal level response.

“I think it’s unfortunate and sad that it is happening. I think it’s very clearly happening in response to external political pressure,” Ghoshal said. “If it’s anything like Elon, which I imagine it is, it’s not something that the university would have chosen to do on its own.”

“ I DON’T AGREE WITH THE EXECUTIVE ORDER OF TRUMP REMOVING FEDERAL FUNDING FROM ANYTHING INVOLVING DEI.

ALEXANDRA VERSACE
UNC CHAPEL HILL SENIOR

Similar to Elon’s AER, Chapel Hill has a U.S. diversity course

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Bird flu raises concerns for poultry industry, public health

The National Guard works to provide rural communities with supplies

Charlotte Pfabe
Elon News Network

Cases of bird flu around the nation are on the rise, hitting 28 states and Puerto Rico over the past 30 days. Also known as Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1, the new highly transmissible and fatal strain of avian flu, D1.1, spreads to animals through contact with wild birds. In just the first five days of February, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported over 20 outbreaks.

In January, the CDC reported three outbreaks of bird flu in North Carolina. The outbreaks were reported in Hyde County, 247 miles away from Elon, and in Sampson County, 134.3 miles from Elon. There have been no reported cases of bird flu in Alamance County.

Nationwide, as of Feb. 11, bird flu has been detected in 11,966 wild birds, according to the CDC, with over 159.3 million poultry birds impacted as of Feb. 14.

Michael Martin, the director

of the veterinary division at the North Carolina Department of Agriculture said the new variant is spreading rapidly and sweeping across the nation.

“This virus has just been very relentless as far as this ongoing outbreak we’ve had,” Martin said. “Although it’s all part of the same outbreak strain, we’ve had a new variant that originated in wild migratory birds in the pacific northwest.”

Since poultry birds, such as chickens, are the most affected by the virus, the outbreak over the past three years has substantially impacted egg production in major suppliers. With the unreliability in egg supply, grocers are raising prices and limiting the number of cartons customers can buy, including Walmart, Trader Joes and Costco.

Over the month of January, the average price for eggs increased 15.2%, according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. Between January of 2024 and 2025, prices of meats, poultry, fish, and eggs rose 6.1%, and the average price of eggs increased 53%.

However, while consumers may be shocked by prices at the supermarket, the recent bird flu outbreaks are not a surprise to



Less than a week after a highly contagious strain of bird flu was found in a Georgia commercial poultry facility for the first time, a second and even larger flock nearby has tested positive for the virus, state agriculture officials said Wednesday, Jan. 22, 2025.

experts. In February 2022, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service announced an outbreak of HPAI A in a commercial poultry facility, the first HPAI A virus detections in commercial poultry in the U.S. since 2020.

According to Martin, North Carolina saw positive cases of H5N1 bird flu as early as 2022, with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reporting 22 cases of avian flu in the state since October 2022.

“What it is, is all of those egg farms across the country over

the course of three years being affected, really affects the supply chain for our eggs,” Martin said. “And as such, these egg prices do go up because of this ongoing national outbreak.”

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Fellows Weekend split in two as numbers grow

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Elon to launch second PA program in 2027

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Burlington bookstore moves out of downtown

PAGE 7 LIFESTYLE

THE PENDULUM

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CORRECTIONS

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

Fellows programs double in applications; Scholarship Weekend is now 2 separate dates

This year 6,217 people applied for fellows programs, last year 3,070 people applied

Fiona McAllister

Elon News Network

As Scholarship Weekend, also known as Fellows Weekend, approaches Elon University has scheduled two separate weekends for potential fellows to come. The first Fellows Weekend will be Feb. 21 to 22 and the following is March 7 to 8.

Changes made to the fellows and honors application process this year resulted in double the number of applications to the programs, according to a statement to Elon News Network from Vice President for Enrollment Greg Zaiser. The changes made to the process resulted in having a separate application available in the Acorn Account after a student applied, making it available in the freshman application. New this year, the Fellows applications were embedded in the Common Application where students submit their general college applications. Zaiser wrote that with the help of faculty directors, they standardized the essay prompt across programs. This year, 6,217 people applied — compared to the 3,070 applicants from last year, according to Zaiser.

“We know that a very high percentage of students who attend what has historically been called Fellows Weekend choose Elon,” Zaiser wrote. “So, with the support

of the Provost’s office, we wanted to offer two weekends to 1) allow more people the opportunity to learn in-depth information about the academic opportunities and 2) ease the stress on facilities capacity, etc. In short, two weekends will allow more people to experience all Elon offers in an engaging, enjoyable way.”

Leadership Fellows and Honors Fellows are the only two programs holding interviews for both weekends, Tierza Watts, director of the Center for Leadership and Leadership Fellows program, said.

Zaiser wrote that Elon Admissions is expecting to see over 400 students and 1,000 people visiting in just the first weekend. The deadline to register for the second Scholarship Weekend has not yet closed, but at this time there are still over 400 students and around 1,200 people registered. This does not account for those who plan to interview virtually. Preparations for the 2025 Scholarship Weekend began a year ago.

“We anticipated growth in apps and, for some time, had been wondering if two weekends would serve students and families better,” Zaiser wrote.

Watts said that the fellows application process being changed this year, through the Common Application, made it easier for students to find — leading to more applications.

After going through hundreds of applications, Watts said the committee invited back around 300 students, 106 of which accepted the invitation for Scholarship Weekend under the Leadership

Fellows program. As of Feb. 18, there are 36 candidates coming for the first weekend and 67 registered for the next weekend. Watts said that the deadline for the second weekend has not closed and the number of candidates for the second weekend could still grow.

One aspect of Scholarship Weekend is interviews for applicants. Watts said she does not conduct the interviews herself, but she helps to assist juniors, seniors and faculty members who interview applicants. The weekend also includes a simulation activity, where she trains students to watch applicants doing a case study group activity.

As for other activities this weekend, Watts said there is also a reception event allowing for social interaction. Followed by the reception is the parent overview, ending the three step Scholarship Weekend process, specifically for the Leadership Fellows Program.

“The stressful thing is figuring it out, because we use all of our students to work some part of the program, and I think the other programs don’t function that way,” Watts said.

Watts said when going through applications, she looks for students who are involved in their high school in many aspects.

“The leadership program is specifically looking for students who demonstrate potential for involvement and engaging in their communities,” Watts said.

Olivia Berger contributed to the reporting of this story.



ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR

A campus tour guide leads a group Feb. 17 toward the Ernest A. Koury Sr. Business Center at Elon University.

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ANSWER KEY

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Students stuff and decorate bears as part of Late Night Elon's "Stuffed with Love" event Feb. 14 in Moseley Student Center. Briston Whitt, a coordinator of Student Involvement who organizes Late Night Elon events, said the event was meant to bring people together for the holiday. "As cliché as it sounds, I do think all we need is love. I think when you get back to the core of that, that is what is most important," Whitt said. "I just wanted to create a space where students can come and celebrate that."

ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR



Students play Cupid's Card: Healthy Relationships Bingo hosted by the Gender and LGBTQIA Center on Feb. 14 in Moseley Student Center.

ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR



Freshman Jayda Angel shoots while being defended in a game against Campbell University on Feb. 16 in Schar Center. The team wore pink shoes in the team's annual Play4Kay game — a national grassroots movement to unite sports with the community to raise awareness about those battling cancer.

JOJO LIEBREICH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Senior Sam Sherry drives into the paint during the game against NC A&T on Feb. 13 in Schar Center. The Phoenix lost 60-59. To read more about the rest of the season for the Phoenix, visit page 8.

PAUL BARRETTO | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Chapel Hill repeals class requirement amid declining Black enrollment, federal policy changes

DEI | from cover

The repeal of the requirement follows the UNC system’s policy banning diversity and inclusion offices and titles at its universities, which took effect in September. At Chapel Hill, this took the form of cutting 20 positions campus-wide, according to a press release from the university. The former D&I office had a budget of \$1.8 million, which was invested in programs to support student success, faculty professional development and salaries of employees.

Chapel Hill’s Black student population is concurrently declining. The class of 2028 is made up of 7.8% Black students, while the class of 2027 is made up of 10.5%, according to a university press release. The total number of Black first year and transfer students dropped more than 25% for this academic year, according to The New York Times.

This decrease comes the year after the Supreme Court’s decision to stop the consideration of race in the admissions process, also known as affirmative action. In the case, UNC was accused of deliberate discrimination against Asian American students and using racial preferences.

“We’re seeing less and less diversity on campus, and if we’re not encouraging students to learn about diversity, I think

there is going to be a lack of diversity at UNC in the future if nothing is done,” Versace said.

Ghoshal said it’s important to teach equity, particularly at predominantly white institutions, such as Elon. As of 2023, Elon’s undergraduate students are 78.4% white, according to its diversity dashboard.

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WE’RE SEEING LESS AND LESS DIVERSITY ON CAMPUS, AND IF WE’RE NOT ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO LEARN ABOUT DIVERSITY, I THINK THERE IS GOING TO BE A LACK OF DIVERSITY AT UNC IN THE FUTURE IF NOTHING IS DONE.

ALEXANDRA VERSACE
UNC CHAPEL HILL SENIOR

“The tough questions that sometimes come up are questions about balancing difficult emotional content for people who are most directly impacted by it, with the fact that most people in the audience may not be directly impacted or affected by it,” Ghoshal said. “How do you balance teaching about racism and race to a lot of students who don’t have direct experience of being racialized, but then some students do, and the backgrounds, experiences, emotional needs, etc, of different types of students might be pretty different.”

Elon’s class of 2028 is the most diverse class in the university’s history with 23% of the population being students of color, according to Elon’s first-year class profile.

Elon’s AER policy passed with over 95% support from the faculty — a rare occurrence, Ghoshal said. He said this is due to the parts of DEI that aren’t often discussed — including having fair access to classrooms for students with disabilities and financial aid resources.

“My sense is that these types of policies generally have pretty strong support in universities, among faculty and among people who have more familiarity with what

universities are doing, and the reasons for that are because most of what is embedded in policies and programs like AER is much more positive and unobjectionable than sometimes the political discourse leads us to believe,” Ghoshal said.

Ghoshal said the reason DEI classes came about was because of the interest in them, not the other way around, which increases their importance.

“The reason that this content is getting taught isn’t because it was externally imposed as a requirement. It’s because people engaged in education and people with background in the workforce recognized that it was important and started to see it kind of proliferating and wanted a framework to to include it,” Ghoshal said. “There is no necessity that if a requirement is formally struck down, there is no necessity that the content needs to stop being taught, and in fact, it may even make it more important to keep on covering topics like this.”

Ghoshal recommends that anyone who isn’t sure about AER or DEI policies should look more in depth into them — past the buzzwords that a politician uses.

“If you’ve heard a politician condemn certain buzzwords, you might have a negative reaction to it, but take a step back and think about it like, ‘Well, OK, if somebody’s against DEI, is it: Are they against diversity? Are they against inclusion? Are they against the idea that people should be able to go to college, even if they didn’t grow up wealthy?’” Ghoshal said.

Carew wrote that the politics surrounding DEI can stray from what it really means at a university like Elon.

“I can imagine there are people who would feel concerned, given the rhetoric and climate of this moment,” Carew wrote. “My response to this is that I personally am deeply dedicated to ensuring all of our students have the opportunity to learn, develop, grow, and evaluate the environments in which they find themselves through understanding multiple perspectives and a wide range of ideas, ideologies, data points, and contexts.”

Even if there is no requirement, Ghoshal said faculty should still talk about DEI in their classes no matter which subject it is — whether its social sciences, business or communications.

“Ultimately, students are going to

graduate into a pretty diverse country. They’re going to be working in workplaces that are seeking to be inclusive,” Ghoshal said. “Taking away the requirement isn’t going to make the importance of those subjects go away.”

Ghoshal said DEI class requirements set students up for success after graduation.

“Most people in the world are not Americans. Most people in the United States are not upper class. People come from all kinds of different race and gender, backgrounds and so on,” Ghoshal said. “Universities continuing to highlight that this content is useful, important for careers and for being a citizen of a diverse country and world would be things that I would suggest.”

“

TAKING AWAY THE REQUIREMENT ISN’T GOING TO MAKE THE IMPORTANCE OF THOSE SUBJECTS GO AWAY.

RAJ GHOSHAL
ELON SOCIOLOGY PROFESSOR

Carew wrote that the AER was established to prepare students for post-graduate life, including respecting human difference and becoming global citizens.

“A great deal of time, care, consideration, and varied perspectives were dedicated to the development of this requirement to ensure that it supports the values and mission of the university, as well as to ensure that it provides important learning opportunities for all students to prepare them for the critical analysis skills that are highly sought after in the workforce and by employers more specifically,” Carew wrote.

Carew also encourages students to look past the politics surrounding DEI and look to how the requirements better society.

“Recent efforts to alter the body politic’s understanding and perception of these concepts do not have to take root in our society,” Carew wrote. “They lie at the heart of our ability to unite and thrive as a nation dedicated to liberty and justice for all.”



KATRINA HOLTZ | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Professor of sociology Raj Ghoshal teaches SOC3410: Racism & Race in the United States, which counts as an AER.

Bird flu raises concerns over poultry supply, egg prices

FLU | from cover

North Carolina is a top producer for chicken nationwide, producing over 976.2 million broilers, or chickens raised for meat, annually according to the North Carolina Department of Agriculture’s website. Broiler production also accounts for more than \$6.8 billion for North Carolina farmers each year.

North Carolina is also ranked first in the nation for poultry and egg sales and second for turkey production, with over 28 million turkeys raised in the state each year. In 2023, North Carolina exported \$353.5 million worth of poultry and poultry products. Agriculture’s impact on the North Carolina economy sits at \$111.1 billion as of 2024, according to the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Martin said since bird flu spreads quickly, isolation is difficult as most of the flock is infected before signs begin to show. He recommends that owners concerned about the health of their domesticated birds should always refer to official resources from the USDA as well as their veterinarians.

Symptoms of bird flu in birds include

but are not limited to low energy or appetite, purple discoloration or swelling of various body parts and reduced egg production according to the American Veterinary Medical Association. However, the main sign of bird flu is rapid death.

“It’s no great way to die with this horrible virus,” Martin said. “The whole nationwide is built on trying to stamp out the virus quickly to prevent its spread to other domestic poultry farms.”

He also said individual owners can prevent contact between their animals and wild birds by cleaning up any spilled animal feed outside, removing water sources that may attract other fowl and removing any bird feeders in areas where domesticated animals are housed.

Many farms around the country are limiting visitors and tours as worries rise about avian flu coming into their flocks from the outside. Martin recommends people with backyard flocks wear designated clothing and shoes when coming into contact with their animals, and that owners wash their hands or shower before and after visiting their birds.

Bird flu has also been detected in cattle, cats, dogs and humans. The CDC and USDA say wild bird droppings that animals come in contact with can carry the virus

and therefore transfer bird flu to humans.

While there are a few reported cases of bird flu in humans, the Food and Drug Administration confirms it’s still safe to consume chicken and eggs that are fully cooked and emphasizes only drinking pasteurized milk, as raw milk can carry

bacteria and other pathogens.

“The virus is really hot right now,” Martin said. “It’s spreading right now. There are concerns and you can never say never, never say always. But there’s no evidence to suggest that this is the next pandemic.”



DREAMSTIME/TNS
Limited and increasingly expensive egg options for grocery shoppers across the U.S. are becoming common amid the ongoing avian influenza outbreak.



Elon physician assistant students Alane Taratuska, left, and Amiee Littlejohn practice finding the optic nerve during their lab Feb. 13. Elon's first PA program, located on Elon's main campus started in 2013.

AVERY SLOAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

New faculty leaders begin planning curriculum this week; program tentative launch date is January 2027

Avery Sloan
Elon News Network

This week, the new program director and medical director will begin working to create Elon's future physicians assistants program coming to Charlotte. The program has a tentative launch date of January 2027 and will be Elon's second PA program — with its first program currently operating on Elon's main campus.

This program will be a two year graduate program with 12 months of didactics — classroom instruction — and 12 months of clinicals — real world experience in the medical field. Elon's current PA program functions the same way, but the two programs will have different curriculums.

Right now, Elon's PA program located in Elon, sees between 2,000 and 3,000 applicants for 36 slots, according to Maha Lund, dean of the school of health sciences. This is part of what made leadership at the school

interested in starting a second program. One of the program's priorities is to ensure that PA students are integrated into the Charlotte community — through more than just their clinical rotations, Lund said. There are over 300 PA programs nationally, and Charlotte is the biggest city in the country to not have a PA program.

"We want to see what organizations are out there that we can partner with to help our students learn about Charlotte and the needs in the Charlotte area," Lund said.

Currently, the Elon campus works to emphasize community interactions and partnerships as well, Kim Stokes, program director for PA department, said. Last week, State Senator Amy Galey visited the PA program and met with faculty and student leaders about Galey's role on the healthcare Senate committee. Students were able to share their own thoughts on healthcare systems, emphasizing the program's focus on committee advocacy, Stokes said.

Students also volunteer weekly with the Open Door Clinic of Alamance County, whose mission is to provide free comprehensive health care services for uninsured and under-served residents in the county. Students have also attended events at

the Dream Center, an organization focused on serving a diverse community within Alamance County with programs such as English literacy classes and Columbian performing arts events. The events PA students have attended emphasized how to better provide care and wellness for patients with a greater cultural understanding, such as conversations around healthy eating for patients with diabetes while allowing for diets that are within one's culture, Stokes said.



SOMETHING THAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT IN PA EDUCATION IS THAT WE EDUCATE STUDENTS TO WORK IN MEDICAL TEAMS.

MAHA LUND
DEAN OF THE SCHOOL OF HEALTH SCIENCES

"We try to make sure that our students have a handle on how to recognize themselves in the profession, how to recognize themselves as a leader, and that they have leadership responsibilities as a health care provider that extend even beyond the walls of the hospital or the health system they may work," Stokes said.

Dr. Timothy Lietz, medical director of the program, said he is excited about the opportunity to increase Elon's name recognition in Charlotte and bring more educated medical professionals to the area.

The program will be housed in the same building as Elon's flex law program in Charlotte and Elon's sports management program in Charlotte, utilizing the same space during the day where law classes will take place at night. There will also be specialized equipment for labs for the students for their didactics.

Lietz said the first steps to creating a PA program will be to hire faculty, create a curriculum and figure out what the clinical rotations will be. Lietz said he will be working with the program director, Dr. Veronica

Marciano, to start this program. While this program will have a separate curriculum from the one on Elon's campus, Lund said she hopes the two programs will interact.

On a faculty level, she said she could see sharing guest lecturers or collaborating on topics different faculty members have more knowledge in between the programs. Another possible avenue for collaboration is to have programming such as a PA Olympics, where students can compete — but also focus on working together. An important aspect of this idea is that Lund said she would not want to see the two programs competing against each other but rather have members of each program split up to integrate the two schools.



AVERY SLOAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Professor Alexis Moore helps guide physician assistant student Gia Cifalino to look through a Panoptic Ophthalmoscope into PA student Regan O'Toole's eye.

"Something that is really important in PA education is that we educate students to work in medical teams," Lund said. "They are not fighting against others, but they're team players, and so I would hope that we can reinforce that by interactions between the two programs."



AVERY SLOAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Elon department of physician assistant studies is apart of the School of Health Sciences and is located in the Francis Center.

Piedmont Shakespeare Company brings free professional theatre to Triad

The company will open its first season with ‘Hamlet’ in the summer in 6 locations

Megan Walsh
Elon News Network

This summer, the Piedmont Shakespeare Company will open its inaugural season performing Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” across six locations in the Piedmont-Triad area.

The company was created by Elon professors David McGraw, serving as executive director of the company, and Kim Shively, serving as a co-artistic director, alongside University of North Carolina School of the Arts professor Carl Forsman. It aims to bring free Shakespeare to people all over the Piedmont Triad region. On Feb. 15, the company announced auditions will be held on March 2 at Elon and March 9 at UNC School of the Arts as well as other employment opportunities.

The company will tour six locations across the region with stops at the Snow Camp Outdoor Theatre south of Burlington, Arts 1 Theater 202 in Lexington, the Oak Ridge Town Park Amphitheater, the Van Dyke Performance Space in Greensboro, the King Central Park Amphitheater, and will close at the May Dell Amphitheater at Salem Academy and College in Winston-Salem.

Shively said the decision to focus on Shakespeare came from the continued relevance of his works.

“At a time where we are becoming increasingly siloed, increasingly divided,” Shively said. “There’s something about Shakespeare’s experience of humanity that makes and the way that Shakespeare talks about our shared humanity that really brings together people in a way that I haven’t seen any other theater do because

Shakespeare was writing for everyone.”

When Shively began teaching at Elon in 2016, she said she wanted to find her partners and start a summer theater to return to her roots.

“That’s the tradition I come from,” Shively said. “It’s been such a powerful influence in my life.”

Once she connected with McGraw, Shively said they had a quick partnership and began planning to start a company. As the pair got ready to launch their company, the COVID-19 pandemic began.

McGraw said the pandemic decimated the theater community, but now the Piedmont Shakespeare Company will work to fix this.

“A number of artists have been forced to leave the area, and so one thing that the summer theater will provide is opportunities for students, but it will also provide opportunities for faculty and staff to be able to stay in the area,” McGraw said. “I’ve had to take my family up to Massachusetts in order to do summer work, and I really want to stay home and make theater for my neighbors.”

After the pandemic, Forsman said he met Shively when they collaborated on a play for UNC School of the Arts. The three partners came together and began the process to create the Piedmont Shakespeare Company.

The company registered its non-profit status in June 2024. The team began quietly fundraising and went public in December. Earlier in February, the company announced “Hamlet” as the show for its inaugural season.

Shively, McGraw and Forsman said they all were in agreement — “Hamlet” needed to be Piedmont Shakespeare Company’s first production. Forsman said he found it very meaningful if the company

could deliver audiences a high quality production of the show.

“It’s the kind of play that everybody thinks they know, but very few people have actually seen a good production of,” Forsman said. “It just feels like it would be so tragic to go through life and never see a good production of Hamlet, what a

“

IT JUST FEELS LIKE IT WOULD BE SO TRAGIC TO GO THROUGH LIFE AND NEVER SEE A GOOD PRODUCTION OF HAMLET, WHAT A DISASTER THAT WOULD BE.

CARL FORSMAN
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL OF THE ARTS PROFESSOR

disaster that would be.”

The company has an agreement with the Actors Equity Association, which McGraw said is the professional union for actors and stage managers. Having the agreement means that “Hamlet” will be cast and staffed exclusively from students, faculty, staff and alumni from the past three years of Elon and UNC School of the Arts.

Senior acting major Sean Mikesch said he intends to audition for the company.

“This is a nice opportunity to really put my skills to the test and hopefully continue to grow throughout that Shakespeare process,” Mikesch said.

Junior arts administration and drama theatre studies double major Abi Colburn will be doing research for the company

as part of Elon’s Summer Undergraduate Research Experience program. Colburn said she will be looking at how to make Shakespeare more accessible and relevant to audiences.

“It really piqued my interest to be able to study how to try to help people fall in love with Shakespeare the same way I have,” Colburn said.

For the inaugural season, Shively said she hopes the show really impacts audiences.

“I hope that it brings people together, and that it helps people feel less lonely, that it inspires people and gives them something to think about and realize that the theater is for everyone, and that they might start seeking out more opportunities to engage in the arts in their community,” Shively said.

Forsman said he can’t wait to see where the season goes.

“I keep thinking about what it’ll be like to have a couple hundred people in the dark listening to Shakespeare together for the first time this summer,” Forsman said. “I can’t wait.”

More information about Piedmont Shakespeare Company on its website and by following its social media on Instagram at pshakesnc and on Facebook at P-Shakes.

Piedmont Shakespeare Company website



Piedmont Shakespeare Company founders Kim Shively, co-artistic director, and David McGraw, executive director, pose Feb. 17 near Lake Mary Nell.

MEGAN WALSH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Persnickety Books prepares to leave downtown Burlington and move into a new space by the end of February. Its new address is 703 East Davis St.

ERIN MARTIN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Local business set to close this weekend, reopen in March a few blocks away

Abigail Hines
Elon News Network

Persnickety Books is saying goodbye to its downtown Burlington location and moving to a new location due to rising rent, according to co-owner of Persnickety Books Ian Baltutis.

Persnickety Books will temporarily close at the end of this week and is set to reopen by the beginning of March. Baltutis, who purchased the bookstore in 2019, said the decision to move was necessary to keep the business alive.

“We were not going to be able to pay what our landlord wanted to charge us for the lease going forward, and so we’re at a make or break point where we had to decide either do we close the store or do we move it to a new location,” Baltutis said.

The new location at 703 East Davis St. is similar in size to the current space but features a different layout. While the current space spans three floors, including an art gallery on the third, and a coffee bar on the main floor, the new space will have around 5,000 sq. ft. on the main floor, which is around double the existing main floor size. Baltutis said he’s excited to see how Persnickety will change with the new space.

“While people look at us as a retail business filled with books, we’re really more of a community resource, a place where people

come together, gather to share ideas, to learn to inspire each other,” Baltutis said.

As Persnickety prepares for the move, Baltutis said the community’s support has made the moving process much easier.



IN THESE TUMULTUOUS TIMES, BEING ABLE TO WALK INTO A COMFORTING, FAMILIAR AND WARM BOOKSTORE AND BE AMONG COMMUNITY IS ALL THAT MUCH MORE IMPORTANT.

IAN BALTUTIS
CO-OWNER OF PERSNICKETY BOOKS

“Thanks to the community support and the number of volunteers we’ve got signed up, we’re really optimistic that the whole move process may just be about a week and a half,” Baltutis said. “We’ll wrap things up here on the 22nd and 23rd, and then we’re hoping to be at least soft opening the new location on March 1st.”

Persnickety Books first opened in the downtown district in 2017, but it moved around the corner to expand the store’s offerings in 2019. After six years in its current space, leaving won’t be easy for Baltutis.



ERIN MARTIN | DESIGNER

“There’s a warmth and a lot of energy we’ve put into curating this space,” Baltutis said. “It’s been an evolution over six years. We’re just finding the right spot for this genre, or this piece of art or this gathering space, and we’re going to have to relearn all of that in the new space.”

Still, he said he believes spaces such as Persnickety Books serve an essential role for the community to gather and connect.

“In these tumultuous times, being able to walk into a comforting, familiar and warm bookstore and be among community is all that much more important,” Baltutis said.

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Junior TK Simpkins goes up for a layup in a game against North Carolina A&T on Feb. 13. The Phoenix lost 59 to 60.

PAUL BARRETTO | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon has lost 6 of its last 9 games, but has won most games since 2015-16 season

Miles Hayford
Elon News Network

Going into its final four games of the season, the Elon men's basketball team is looking to shake off a late-season skid and capitalize off a massive road win over the University of North Carolina, Wilmington and enter the conference tournament strong.

The team has entered a rough patch as of late, losing six of its last nine games, including a recent three game losing streak. The streak was just broken with a monumental bounce-back win over UNCW, the second ranked team in the Coastal Athletic Association. Elon has had one of its best seasons in many years, winning 16 games — the most since the 2015-16 season. Its seven conference wins is also tied for the second most in school history. Elon is currently ranked sixth out of 14 in the CAA standings.

The peak of the team's recent struggles was found in its 1-point loss to North Carolina A&T on Feb. 13. The Aggies entered the game with zero conference wins and have a 5-22 record. However, passive play and a number of turnovers allowed the Aggies to upset the Phoenix. At one point, Elon held a 10-point lead, but A&T stormed back in the second half. Head coach Billy Taylor said he was disappointed in the team's performance.

"We've got to learn from these kinds of moments, these opportunities," Taylor said in the postgame press conference. "We got passive against their changing defense. We didn't attack the paint. We didn't play with any force around the rim, we only had 24 points in the paint tonight."

“

WE KNOW WE SHOULD HAVE WON. WE ARE JUST HURTING FROM THAT.

ANDREW KING
REDSHIRT SOPHOMORE

A key factor in the loss was the absence of the team's leading scorer in points per game this season, sophomore Nick Dorn. Dorn was out due to a lower extremity injury and is out indefinitely with no timetable to return, according to a statement by Elon Athletics. Lower extremity injuries refer to a range of conditions that affects the muscles, bones, joints and connective tissues of the lower limb, which includes the hips, thighs, knees, ankles and feet. The loss could be devastating for the Phoenix if it enters the conference tournament without Dorn.

Redshirt sophomore Andrew King said after the A&T game that team members will have to improve their game and step up in Dorn's absence. The team's presence from

beyond the arc will be significantly impacted as Dorn makes up for 35% of the team's 3-pointers. Taylor said after the game that it was hard for the team to adjust to Dorn's absence.

"It's a tough time of the year, but they're trying to figure themselves out," Taylor said. "Obviously we're playing a little bit different now without our leading scorer. So we're figuring it out."

King said he was frustrated with the result against A&T and believes he needs to step up as a leader for the Phoenix in order for the team to see success the rest of the season.

"We know we should have won. We are just hurting from that," King said after the game. "We need to figure out how to get over the hump."

The Phoenix bounced back after the loss with a 81-70 victory on the road against UNCW. Elon's win over UNCW was an unexpected victory as it broke the Seahawks' nine-game win streak. Junior TK Simpkins stepped up in Dorn's absence, scoring 32 points — the most by a single player this season. He made 8 3-pointers, the second highest total in a game in school history.

The game was a massive, much needed-win for the Phoenix, and the team will hope to carry on the momentum in the final stretch of the regular season. Elon's final two home games will be against some of the best teams in the conference. On Feb. 20, Elon will face Towson, which is ranked first in the conference standings.

Towson boasts a 13-1 conference

record, with a 12 game win streak. Tyler Tejada spearheads the team, averaging a team-high 16.4 points per game along with 37 3-pointers on the season. Despite Towson's impressive record, it won't be easy for the Tigers. It will be a fiercely competitive game between Elon and Towson as they are almost mirror images of each other statistically. Elon holds its opponents to 68.5 points per game, whereas Towson allows 65.3 points per game. Both teams make about 25 field goals per game, but Elon outperforms the Tigers in rebounds with an average of 40.7 per game compared to Towson's 37.

“

WE'LL KEEP WORKING IT, AND WE'LL STAY POSITIVE.

BILLY TAYLOR
HEAD COACH

Two days after the juggernaut matchup against Towson, Elon will have its final home game of the season and play William & Mary, who is tied for third in the CAA. The Tribe will be another tough match for the Phoenix. William & Mary has a strong offensive presence averaging 78.5 points per game compared to Elon's 74.1.

A key to Elon's success this season has been its physicality. Elon currently averages more rebounds

per game and has a whopping 112 blocks on the season, compared to the Tribe's meager 45 blocks. If the Phoenix is able to get physical in the paint and secure rebounds, it might be able to withstand William & Mary's offense. An important contributor to this physicality will have to be graduate student Matthew Van Komen. The 7-foot-4-inch center is coming off an impressive performance at UNCW where he amassed five blocks and seven rebounds.

Elon previously played William & Mary on the road in January but lost 78-65. Elon had a 1-point lead going into the second half but could not withstand the offensive force of the Tribe in the second half.

After its final two home games, Elon will go on the road and close out its season against Monmouth and Stony Brook before heading to Washington, D.C., on March 7 for the CAA Championship Tournament and fight for a bid to the NCAA Tournament. Taylor said after the game against North Carolina A&T that he believes guys will step up down the stretch.

"We'll keep working it, and we'll stay positive," Taylor said. "So we've got some guys that can step up for us."

IF YOU GO

Elon vs. Towson – 7 p.m. Feb. 20 at the Schar Center

Elon vs. William & Mary – 7 p.m. Feb. 22 at the Schar Center

Tickets can be purchased at elontickets.com. Student and Elon staff tickets are free.