

University growth threatens financial viability of town

Elon University requires more municipal resources despite being mostly tax exempt

Alexander Siegel
Photo Editor

As Elon University continues to expand its presence in the town of Elon, the financial viability of the town could be in flux.

Due to the size of Elon University, the town of Elon requires additional resources, such as police officers and fire trucks. This need results in higher taxes for the town of Elon residents, according to Elon town manager, Richard Roedner.

According to the 2026 Tax Assessment Report provided to Elon News Network by Roedner, Elon University owns approximately 640 acres, or 484 American football fields, of property within the town of Elon municipal limits.

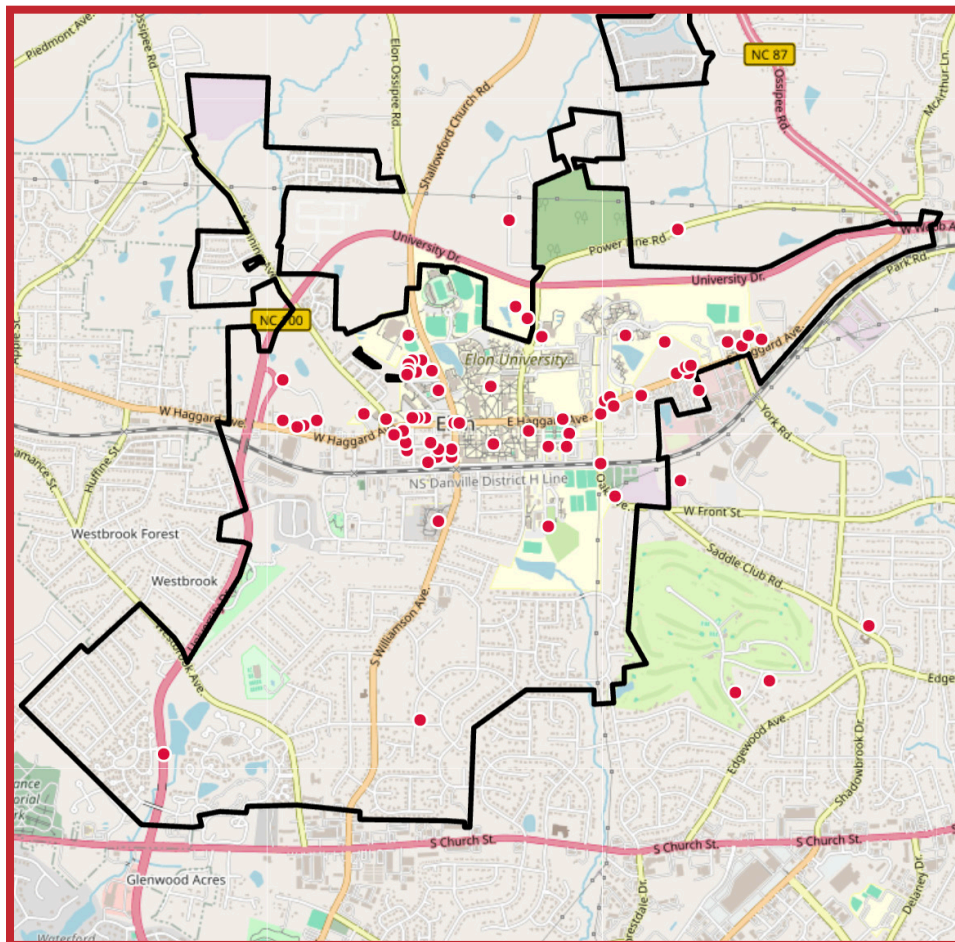
For reference, the town of Elon is about 2,600 acres, or just over four square miles. Of those four square miles,

the 640 acres owned by Elon University is 24.6% of the total land mass of the town.

On these land plots sit educational buildings, athletic facilities, dormitories, as well as vacant, unused land. This unused land includes nearly 100 acres along University and Power Line Drives.

Elon is listed under three names registered with the Alamance County Tax Department: "Elon University," "Elon College" and "Elon University Campus."

Across all of the plots owned by those three entities, the plots are worth over \$591 million. But the university only pays around \$46 million in property taxes annually, which represents less than eight percent of the assessed taxable value. This is due to the university being a nonprofit.



OPENSTREETMAP CONTRIBUTORS

A map shows Elon University-owned properties within and around the town of Elon.

"There are other parcels that, like in town, the university owns a bunch of vacant lots. Downtown and elsewhere. Those are not used for educational purposes because they're vacant lots, so

they do pay taxes on those," Roedner said.

See PROPERTY | pg. 2

Elon alum turns childhood loss into student scholarship

Class of 2023 alum establishes a \$2 million endowment

Emma Luckman
Elon News Network



COURTESY OF AIDAN STEINBACH

Aidan Steinbach as a young child sits with his mother in a family photograph.

ABOUT AIDAN STEINBACH

25 years old
Elon class of 2023
Pledged a \$2 million estate gift
Scholarship supports students who have lost a parent
Preference for entrepreneurship majors

On former Elon University student Aidan Steinbach's desk rests a framed photograph of his mother, Michelle Mayer, alongside a note from his peer written on his first day as an Elon University leadership fellow. It reads: "You make her proud."

Steinbach '23, now 25 years old, lost his mother to scleroderma, a terminal autoimmune disease, when he was just 7 years old. Before her death, Mayer, a research assistant professor in health policy and management at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, prepared birthday gifts for him to open every birthday until he turned 18.

"Each gift was some lesson that I would carry with me for the rest of my life," Steinbach said. "She left me ties. People judge you first on your appearance, and second on who you are. She left me Hardy Boys books to stay curious, and a compass because life is confusing and hard."

He said each lesson helped him stay connected with his mother. To carry that legacy forward, Steinbach pledged a \$2 million estate gift to Elon University to fund a scholarship for students who have lost a parent, with a preference for entrepreneurship majors.

See SCHOLARSHIP | pg. 6

Absentee ballot guidance changes ahead of midterms

Two updated board of elections memos give county election officials new guidance on absentee ballot returns, envelope deficiencies

Lily Mosbacher
Lifestyle Editor

North Carolina voters have two updated procedures to pay attention to when it comes to returning their absentee ballots for this year's midterm elections.

The North Carolina State Board of Elections updated two numbered memos this month that provide counties with guidance on absentee ballot returns and deficiencies. The changes affect how county election officials handle ballots that are returned in person and ballots with problems involving their return envelopes.

The memos are not new documents. One of the memos, which addresses the in-person return of absentee ballots, was originally issued in 2020 and updated once before this. The other memo addresses envelope seal problems and was originally issued in 2021 and had gone through two other updates prior to September.

These updates came as the state board worked to give county boards guidance ahead of the upcoming election.

Jason Tyson, director of external affairs for the state board, said numbered memos are a form of executive guidance used to provide counties with administrative direction. He said the current administration has not typically opted for the numbered memo process.

"What the board did was to just move

the date up of application from January first to apply for this election. So our counties would know and have that guidance on how to treat those two instances," Tyson said.

The state board had adopted several other proposed absentee voting rules this summer which went to the Rules Review Commission and a public comment period.

2,877

Alamance County voters cast absentee-by-mail ballots in the 2022 general election

4.8%

of all ballots cast in Alamance County

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Elon Votes! explains voter registration process

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New course teaches student how to make bread

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Freshman kicker looks to make his mark on team

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THE PENDULUM

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NEWSLETTER



Elon University expands presence in town

PROPERTY | from cover

Roedner said the university's taxable valuation is about 59% of the town's. The town charges a tax rate of 40 cents for every \$100 that a property is valued. Therefore, the town's overall tax revenue could be as high as \$3,300,000. However, according to Roedner, the actual overall tax revenue is only \$1,100,000.

The gap in revenue is due to Elon University's property tax exemption, granted to Elon by Alamance County. This means that Elon does not pay property taxes to the town on plots with an educational use. Elon University is exempted from property taxes on 31 of its 76 plots.

For example, if the university purchased a house within the town limits, and left it vacant, it is not serving an "educational purpose," and therefore would not be eligible for tax exempt status, according to Roedner. However, if the university rented the house to alumni while they were in town or utilized it as student housing, that may be considered "educational," making the property eligible for tax exemption.

Because of the university's presence, the town requires more resources, Roedner said. "If the university were not here, we wouldn't have nearly the amount of services we have," Roedner said. "We wouldn't need as big a police department. We wouldn't need a new ladder truck for the fire department. We wouldn't, because we have a much smaller community, but because the university is here, we have to provide all those services at a much higher level than we would otherwise."

Roedner said that because the university takes up most of the town's space, there is no tax revenue coming in from that.

"The fact that they don't pay taxes means that the rest of the residents have to pay more in tax to cover the costs associated with service in the university," Roedner said.

Elon University Advancement and External Affairs did not respond to Elon News Network's request for an interview.

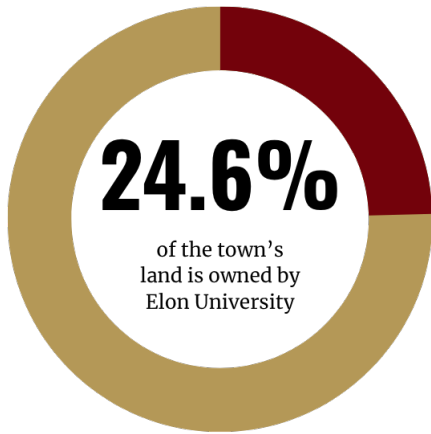
According to Roedner, there is a limit to the amount of land Elon University can



31
out of
76

parcels exempt
from property
taxes

purchase or own before the financial viability of the town is jeopardized, but that amount is currently unknown.



According to Roedner, purchasing all the buildings in downtown Elon to build more dorms would be one example that could threaten the finances of the town.

Roedner also said that further expansion by the university would lead to fewer opportunities for other people to purchase vacant land and add tax value to it through

building.

"You certainly could make a case that it has already affected our financial sustainability," Roedner said. "Because the only land that can create value for us is located on the other side of University Drive. We're bound by Gibsonville on one side and Burlington on the other two sides, and so all the normal land internal to the town that you would normally grow is not open for growth, so we have a very narrow corridor to the north where we can grow."

The university also owns six land plots within the Burlington city limits.

Elon University has also begun expanding in the eastern part of the state, and upon the completion of the Elon-Queens merger, will have a 50 acre campus in Charlotte.

Within the past five years, the University has purchased about 38 acres of land throughout the town of Elon and city of Burlington. These acres are spread unequally between 16 plots, and make up nearly six percent of the total land owned.

According to Roedner, of the 640 acres owned by Elon, about 13 vacant acres were purchased within the past year. The school has proposed rezoning this land for university purposes.

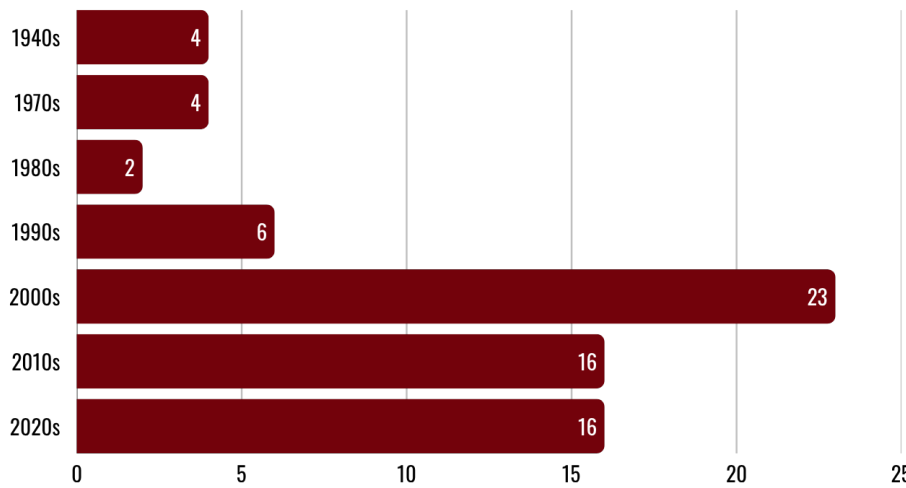
Roedner noted that Elon University gives the town of Elon approximately \$200,000 annually, based upon the needs of the fire and police departments, as well as downtown Elon and the general government.

He also mentioned that \$450,000 was donated by the university towards the purchase of the fire department's new ladder truck, costing over two million dollars.

There was a communication dispute between the town and university in April of this year, resulting in the funding being withheld initially. This came as a result of fire code violations that had gone unaddressed, discovered during an inspection.

"Because the university is still withholding funds for the fire department, totaling approximately \$423,524, with a commitment of releasing the funds only if we maintain a positive collaborative relationship with the university," Roedner wrote in a memo back in April.

Property records show decades of expansion



DATA VISUALIZATION BY AMELIA METZ

*2020s include dated purchases through May 2026. Five properties in the dataset did not list purchase dates.

How ENN got the story

A transparent look at the sources, records and reporting behind this story

To write this story, Elon News Network's photo editor Alexander Siegel reviewed records published on the Alamance County Property Record Search website, along with the 2026 Tax Assessment Report provided to ENN by Elon town manager Richard Roedner. As Siegel reviewed records, he analyzed the expansion of the university into the town by decade, by acreage and by value of the properties. Initially, Siegel was trying to answer the question, "How much property does Elon University own in the town?"

After an interview with Roedner, Siegel discovered that the answer to the question was one piece of a much larger story, which is "How does the amount of land owned by the university affect the town?"

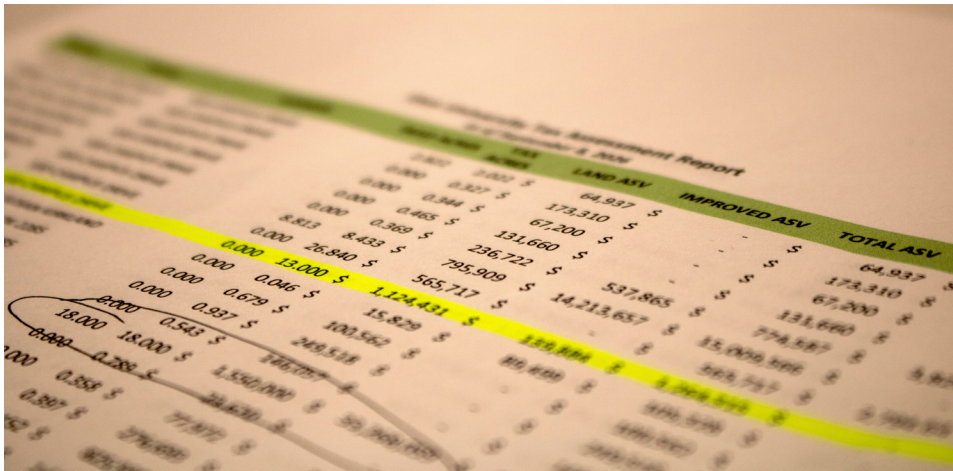


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY MILES HAYFORD

Throughout the research process, Siegel attempted to contact Elon University Senior Vice President for Advancement and External Affairs Jim Piatt, via email to

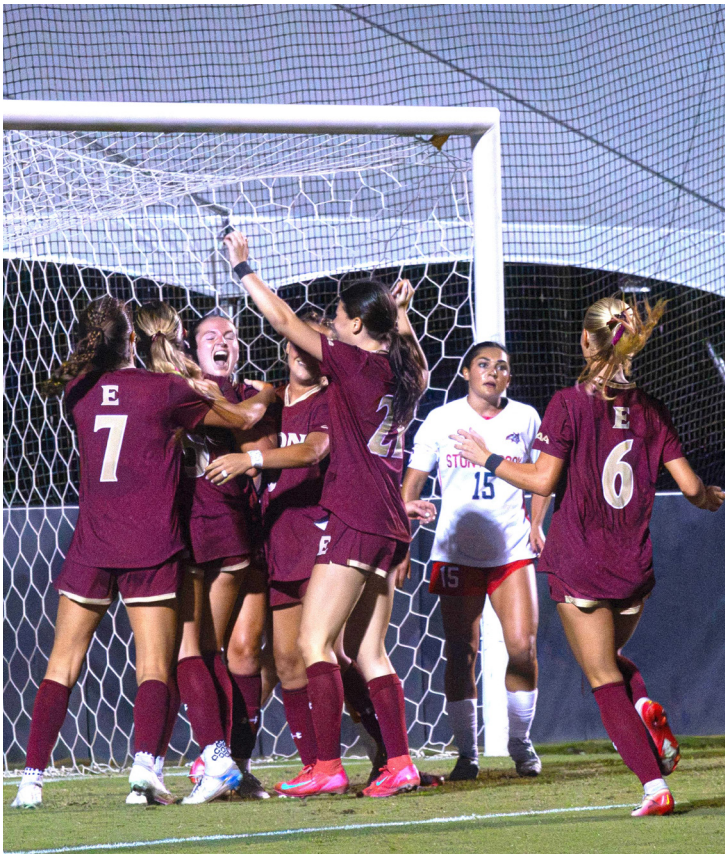
request an interview in regards to the future plans of the university. At the time of writing this article, Siegel has not received a response from him or his office.



KATRINA HOLTZ | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Elon's oldest all-female a capella group, Sweet Signatures, perform "Trumpets" by Jason Derulo during ROCKapella 2026 on Sept. 26 in Alumni Gym. The annual event featured performances from all seven of Elon's student a capella groups. The event was attended by families as they experienced Family Weekend at Elon. "That's what makes the energy of this audience particularly special," said Tucker Mattison, music director for Rip_Chord, one of Elon's all-male a capella groups. "You know who you perform to. You want to show off."



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR
Elon University redshirt junior tight end Dylan Magazu runs down the field with the ball, scoring a 57-yard touchdown, during Elon's 43-17 win over the University of Maine on Sept. 26 at Rhodes Stadium. The win comes after Elon's loss to Maine last year. "It was a bitter, bitter taste in our mouth after last year, and that was like our mindset going in," graduate defensive captain Jevan Brown said. "If you heard the locker room, it was 'Get back.'"



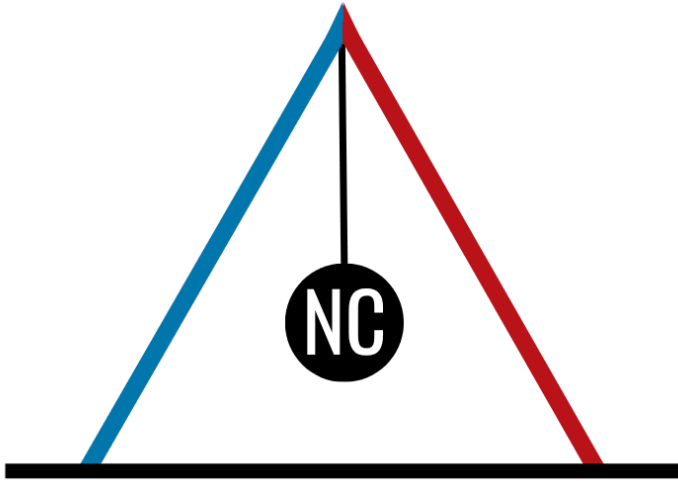
MEGAN COFFEY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Elon University women's soccer celebrates after scoring against Stony Brook University on Sept. 24 at Rudd Field. Elon won 2-1 to win their third straight after scoring with five minutes remaining. "I think it was a good physical game by both teams, but that's the kind of team we are," head coach Neil Payne said. "We've got a mindset that we won't give up, and we have been particularly good at defending leads and closing out games."



KATRINA HOLTZ | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Elon's oldest a capella group, Twisted Measure performs "Nobody's Solider," Hozier during ROCKapella 2026 on Sept. 26 in Alumni Gym.



EMMA PERMAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Emergency personnel respond to a fire after an insulation caught fire as crews completed plumbing work in a crawl space Sept. 23 at E apartments. The apartments are currently vacant as they undergo a remodel.



THE POLITICAL PENDULUM

DESIGN BY AMELIA METZ



Aayra Potti
Columnist

A quick, rapid-fire round up of the latest political news impacting Alamance County, North Carolina and the nation.

LOCAL

1. Alamance County debates library committee appointees
2. Strong support found for amendments on NC ballot

The Alamance County Board of Commissioners bypassed traditional recommendations to appoint their own appointments to the county Library Committee in a recent meeting. This has caused them to face public scrutiny on the matter.

Impact: This decision taps into a broad debate going on in the US in regard to public access to information and institutional oversight.

According to an Elon University Poll, strong support was revealed both locally and statewide for three major constitutional referendums on the midterm ballot in November. These amendments concern the requirement of photo ID to vote, a maximum of 3.5% set for individual income tax and a law requirement to limit property taxes.

Impact: These are referendums that will be included on the ballot in two months from now, and applicable across North Carolina.

STATE

1. Atrium-WakeMed healthcare merger
2. Presidential and vice-presidential visit to NC

The proposed multi-billion-dollar merger between the North Carolina healthcare giants, Atrium and WakeMed, was approved by the Wake County Board of Commissioners. State and federal regulators still need to sign off on this deal, amid debate. While the health systems boast a mission of securing price caps and making healthcare more accessible, there are concerns of rising prices for patients and a monopolized framework.

Impact: Localized hospital consolidation could directly impact out-of-pocket medical costs, student health centers across the state, and access to care, while the monopolized company could change job competition for students coming into the industry.

President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance visited North Carolina to show their support for the conservative nominee for Senate, Michael Whatley. They pushed for high voter turnout at major campaign rallies in Gastonia and Greensboro.

Impact: Both Democrats and Republicans are heavily watching the North Carolina midterm elections as a possibility to flip Congress.

NATIONAL

1. Suspension of White House coverage and lifting of press ban
2. "Protect College Sports Act" passes Senate

In the days following the Trump Administration's decision to ban journalists from CNN, Politico and MS NOW from the White House, other major news networks collectively protested and suspended their press pool coverage, while the originally banned outlets filed a federal lawsuit based on their First Amendment rights. In recent days, a federal judge has lifted the ban with a court order. This order lasts 14 days, and developments are likely to continue.

Impact: There is possible complications for consumers who may not be able to receive their White House related news from their normal sources, while this clash marks a historic event in politics.

A major bipartisan college sports bill, led by Sen. Ted Cruz and Sen. Maria Cantwell, passed on a 77-22 vote and now moves to the House. This bill focuses on establishing a framework to regulate name, image and likeness deals, cap revenue sharing and granting the NCAA and other conferences antitrust exemptions. Some critics argue it shields major organizations from accountability and restricts players movement and compensation.

Impact: This legislation aims to standardize regulations nationwide, affecting the future of collegiate athletics, NIL rights, and student-athlete compensation.

Absentee ballot guidance changes ahead of midterms

ABSENTEE | from cover

Tyson said that the board has not received any real pushback from election administrators.

"The counties understand that they need it. We understand the time constraint that we were under there," Tyson said.

“

WE WANT TO MAKE SURE VOTERS HAVE EASY, CLEAR GUIDELINES ON HOW TO RETURN THEIR BALLOT BY MAIL OR IF THEY'RE VOTING IN PERSON OR WHATNOT.

JOSELLE TORRES
DEMOCRACY NC COMMUNICATIONS
MANAGER

The changes apply to a voting method used by thousands of residents. According to the North Carolina State Board of Elections' website, in the 2022 general election, 2,877 Alamance County voters cast absentee-by-mail ballots, accounting for about 4.8% of the county's 60,155 voters who cast ballots.

Statewide, 187,746 voters cast absentee-by-mail ballots, about 5% of the 3.79 million votes cast.

Joselle Torres, communications manager for the advocacy group Democracy North Carolina, said the change could create additional steps for voters whose ballots have envelope problems.

"With the update of this memo, if the envelope itself isn't properly sealed, that could now be spoiled, rejected and a new ballot would be sent out, or you could come and vote in person," Torres said.

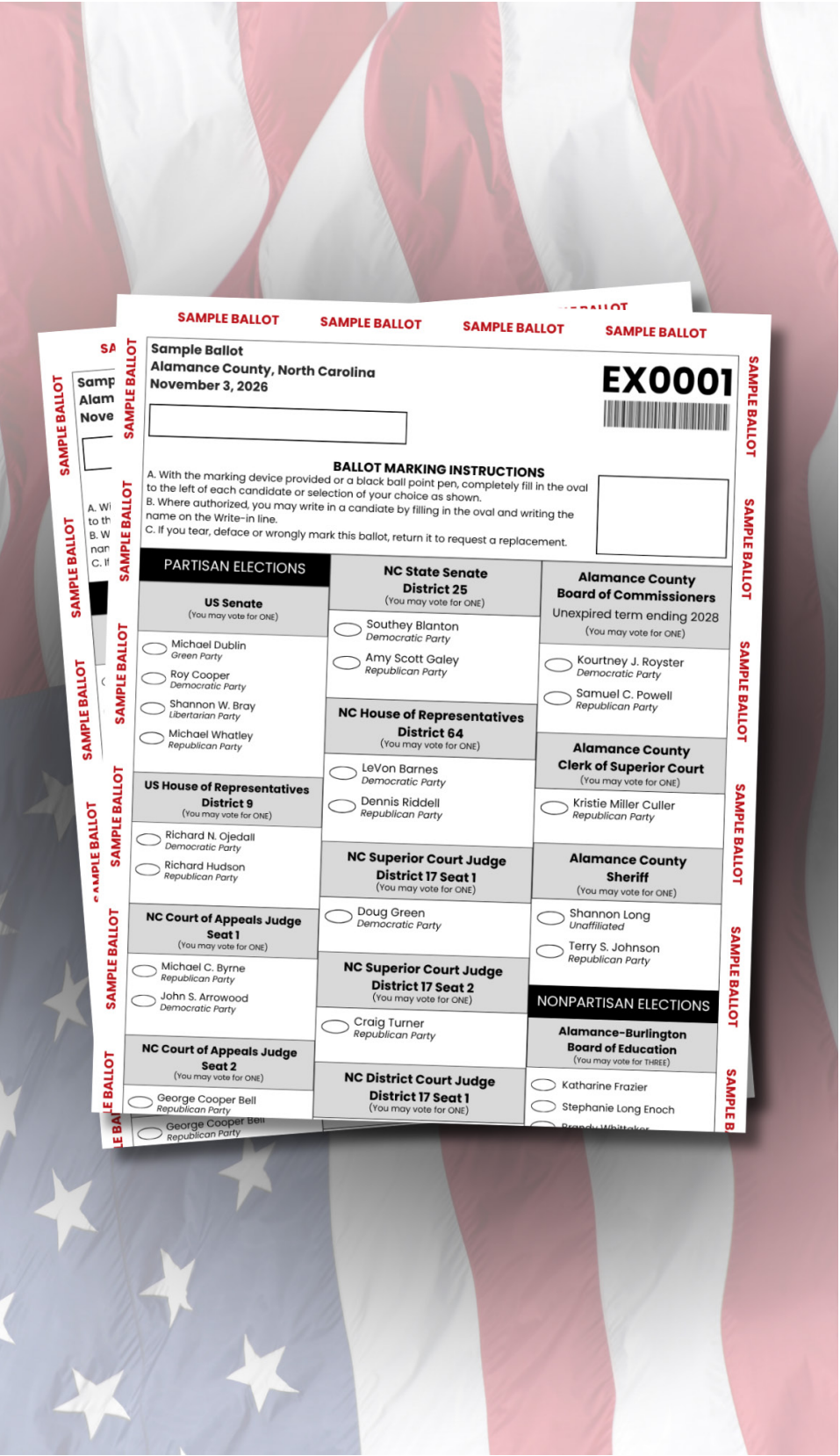
Torres said a cure process where ballots can be spoiled and reissued will allow voters to correct certain problems, but a reissued ballot can add time to the process. She encouraged voters who plan to vote by mail to return their ballots as early as possible.

The state board's updated guidance came 60 days before the midterms and as absentee ballots are being sent to voters for the 2026 election.

Torres said the changes make voter education especially important as voters navigate the updated absentee process.

"We are wanting to make sure voters have easy, clear guidelines on how to return their ballot by mail or if they're voting in person or whatnot," Torres said.

Torres said that for voters choosing to vote by mail, the changes make the return process especially important. Voters must follow the instructions accompanying their ballot and can use the state board's cure process if they are notified that an issue needs to be corrected.



Elon Votes! details how to register to vote on campus

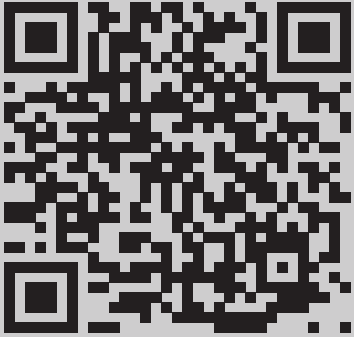
Students can register during early voting period

Trista Panagakos
Politics Editor

Elon Votes! and the Kernodle Center for Civic Life are encouraging students to be more civically engaged this election season. The organizations are hosting multiple voter registration drives before early voting begins Oct. 15. Co-coordinator of Elon Votes! Olivia Brown sat down with Elon News Network to discuss how students can vote and said she hopes these drives help to inform and empower students when they vote.

This interview was edited for clarity.

CHECK
YOUR
VOTER
REGISTRATION



How can students register to vote in Alamance County?

There’s actually multiple ways. We do host registration drives for students to vote, and if you can’t make it, we also do have, with TurboVote on our website, there is step-by-step instructions for how you can register. With technology, things can go wrong or it can be a little bit confusing, because it’s a multi-step process. We have an early voting campus site in South Gym, from Oct. 15 to Oct. 31, and you can register and vote on the same day. So that’s the easiest way to go about it.

How long does this process usually take?

That depends on the board of elections, but I would say it’s maybe about a week that they take. They’re very quick with it, so you should be able to be approved very quickly.

Is this process different for people that want to vote in their home state?

Yes, for voting in your home state you would need to request an absentee ballot. You would need to first request, and then it gets sent to you, and then you would have to fill it out, and then send it back. So that requires a couple more steps to it.

Does Elon Votes help in any way with that?

Yes, we can always help you request an absentee ballot with TurboVote, they can pull up the correct forms for any of the 50 states, and we can help you fill it out and get it mailed out, get you your stamp and everything. That way it gets mailed to the right place. And when you get it back, that’s more of you fill it out, but then we can help with that.

If students were registered to vote two years ago, and then they moved off campus, or they moved to a different dorm, do they have to update their registration to include the new address?

If you got one that was in 2024 and is now expired, you need to get a new one, which would also include you updating your address on it.

How does that process work?

That is really simple. Your standard Phoenix ID card that you just get when you’re a student doesn’t actually count as a valid form of ID for when you vote. But if you go to the office for Phoenix Cards, they can get you a voter ID card, and it’s super easy, super simple. It takes just a couple minutes, and it will say it’s a valid ID card for voting.

What are some important dates and deadlines students should be aware of when it comes to registering or voting?

Well, we have until the ninth to register to vote, but if you miss that deadline, you can still absolutely vote.
You can register and vote at the same time with early voting.

What do students need to be aware of to know that they’re registered and they could go and vote?

After you register to vote, you will get your little card that says that you’ve registered, that’ll come back in the mail. Depending on the place you put, most students do put their campus box, so it’ll just be a little letter that’s sent to you that says, “Oh, you’ve registered,” and it’s just to make sure that you know. And then once you get that you’re good to go.



Important dates

Oct. 9.....	Registration deadline
Oct. 15 to Oct. 31.....	Early voting
Nov. 3.....	Election day

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SCAN THE QR CODE

Class of 2023 alum creates \$2 million scholarship

SCHOLARSHIP | from cover

“I got to go to school debt-free because my mom died. Her life insurance paid for my education,” Steinbach said. “From a very young age, it was abundantly clear to me that objectively good things can and should come from objectively bad things. The hope is that when I die, something objectively good will happen. People’s education will be supported.”

During his time at Elon, Steinbach said he felt isolated as he managed grief while surrounded by his peers who, at times, he felt, didn’t fully understand what he was going through.

“My perception that the world was this beautiful, magnificent, incredible place was shattered when I was a child, and I had to rebuild that for the rest of my life,” Steinbach said. “In college, people are worried about, is their situationship texting them back? Are you in this sorority or this frat or this paper is hard? And I’m like, ‘People are dying, dude.’ We had totally different problems.”

He said he found stability through close campus bonds, including his former roommate Kevin Coelho, who met him through the Doherty Center for Creativity, Innovation and Entrepreneurship in 2022.

“He is an incredibly positive and optimistic guy. He will always give you the silver lining,



PHOTO COURTESY OF AIDAN STEINBACH

Aidan Steinbach (right) poses with his mother and sister in an undated family photograph.

the positive spin,” Coelho said. “It’s just his motor. He’s always pushing forward, and that

spills out into the people’s lives around him. He inspires them. He inspires a better work ethic.”

“

MY PERCEPTION THAT THE WORLD WAS THIS BEAUTIFUL, MAGNIFICENT, INCREDIBLE PLACE WAS SHATTERED WHEN I WAS A CHILD.

AIDAN STEINBACH
’23 ELON ALUM

Steinbach said that the scholarship is meant to equip grieving students with that same drive to push forward.

“It’s not a safety net. It is a tool,” Steinbach said. “You are stronger than almost anyone else in the world. You are going through one of the most painful and brutal things you can go through at an age when you should not. It is not fair. It’s not fun. It sucks.”

Rather than letting that pain define him, Steinbach views the loss as an enduring reminder of his capacity to persevere.

New class gives students a taste of bread making

New HealthEU course gives 12 students hands-on experience with bread, pasta, sourdough

Brinna Hayes
Elon News Network

A HealthEU course was offered for the first time this fall at Elon University, and it wasn’t just about well-being: It was about bread.

The Art of Bread Making is a new course being taught by Alexander Taylor, an associate registrar and data analyst at Elon.

Taylor has been a home baker for 10 years, and said he wanted to use this class to explore bread making further.

Taylor said his journey with bread making started with pizza dough.

“I have some friends that used to make pizzas,” he said. “When I first saw it I was in awe of them cranking through all these pizzas. So I got to asking them ‘How do you do it?’”

Taylor said he was introduced to breadmaking through multiple books, one that he pointed out was “Flour Water Salt Yeast” by Ken Forkish. It motivated him to explore more into the practice.

“I fell in love with just the sort of curiosity of all the failures and all the struggles that always came with ‘Well, how can I make this better?’” Taylor said.

The course is designed to have students learn the basic stages of bread making before transitioning to the wide array of different types of bread and dough types.

“The first goal of this was to introduce students to a wide swath of different bread



BRINNA HAYES | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Alexander Taylor teaches his students how to knead pasta dough during a class of The Art of Bread Making on Sept. 24

applications with different bread products,” Taylor said.

Students in the class learn about six bread types: bagels, pretzels, brioche, sandwich breads, pizzas, and focaccia. They also learn about pasta making as well, incorporating lessons about gluten and flour.

Taylor said some students in the class experience failures with doughs and loaves not working out as they expected. Taylor wants them to take away the lesson that these failures are learning opportunities, not setbacks.

“The failure that you get from bread – I have probably made an equal number of breads that have failed than ones that have been the perfect loaves,” Taylor said.

“

A BIG GOAL BEHIND THE CLASS IS DEMYSTIFYING. BREAD CAN BE ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYBODY.

ALEXANDER TAYLOR
ELON UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATE REGISTRAR

His other goal in the course is to normalize bread making for students.

“A lot of people think that it’s too hard for them and they don’t know the chemistry behind it,” he said. “A big goal behind the class is demystifying. Bread can be accessible to everybody,” Taylor said.

The class has 12 bakers this semester, and among them, Taylor said a community is being built. Students call Taylor by a nickname, Xander. They even have a class pet.

Senior Astrid Hughes said she decided

to take the class after being exposed to sourdough through social media. She came up with the class pet’s name, which affectionately became Jon Doughly.

“I simply came up with the sourdough starter idea as a class pet,” Taylor said. “They took it over the top by coming up with the perfect name for it.”

Hughes said she had a mental block with bread making prior to the class.

“I’ve never tried to make it myself because I’ve heard that it’s not an easy thing to do,” she said. “It’s pretty cool that now I have the experience and I would feel more comfortable doing it at home.”

Junior Liv Dixon has worked with Taylor at the registrar’s office in the past, and his passion for bread making motivated her to take the class. For her, the class is a way to wind down.

“It’s a really great way to slow down,” Dixon said. “It’s a really wholesome activity to do day-to-day.”

Students are also encouraged to take home their creations and bake them there.

“Being able to bring it home and bake for my roommates or my family has been really refreshing,” Dixon said.

The result of the class has been heartwarming to Taylor.

“The students and the love for this has been unbelievable as a teacher,” he said. “This fall semester has only affirmed my excitement for the course.”



BRINNA HAYES | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Students experiment with creating different pasta shapes during the Art of Bread Making on Sept. 24

From soccer to football: Finding a place on the field



Elon University freshman kicker Leo Taylor kicks the ball during Elon's win over the University of Maine on Sept. 26 at Rhodes Stadium.

ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Freshman kicker navigates life, congenital limb difference, working to make his mark on football team

Mia Torres
Producer of On Air

For Elon freshman kicker Leo Taylor, his athletic career has been shaped by learning to not let other people's expectations determine what he can do.

Kicking the ball at the Division I level is the latest step in a journey that began with soccer. He played soccer through his childhood before turning to football as a way to stay involved with sports without feeling the pressure he began to feel playing soccer at a high level.

"I was starting to really stress with soccer and wanted to find other ways to enjoy myself still in sport," Taylor said. "And so kicking kind of came up."

Taylor first tried football and soccer during his freshman year of high school. As he played both sports he found he enjoyed the football environment more.

"I really loved the spirit in the team," Taylor said. "It was just fun to be with people and play."

His path to Elon was not immediate.

Taylor said his recruiting process

included "a lot of ups and downs" and moments where he felt disappointed.

Taylor was born with a congenital limb difference that stopped the growth of his right arm. This was one factor, he said, that some schools struggled to understand during the recruiting process.

Elon's coaching staff took a different approach.

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I DIDN'T WANT TO BE SEEN AS A MASCOT. I DIDN'T WANT TO BE A PROMOTIONAL TOOL.

LEO TAYLOR
ELON FRESHMAN KICKER

Elon assistant special teams coach Mike Nall first heard about Taylor through a kicking and punting coach in the Chicago area. Nall initially did not expect the recommendation to be different from the others he'd received, but after watching Taylor's film, he saw potential.

Nall said Taylor's arm did not affect his ability to kick and that his kicking ability,

work ethic and commitment to improving stood out during the recruiting process.

"As far as I'm concerned, that right arm has nothing to do with being a good kicker," Nall said.

Taylor said growing up his parents encouraged him not to treat it as something that should prevent him from trying new things. That mindset allowed him to enjoy his childhood without constantly focusing on his arm.

That perspective has carried into his friendships. Taylor said even his closest friends sometimes forget about his limb difference.

"I don't make it as much of a way of life as maybe people would think," Taylor said.

When he arrived at Elon however, Taylor had concerns about whether his teammates and coaches would see him differently.

"I didn't want to be seen like a mascot," Taylor said. "I didn't want to be a promotional tool."

Instead he wanted to be treated like any other member of the football team.

Nall said that has been the approach from the coaching staff. Taylor has participated in team activities and has even worked as scout-team receiver at practices.

"He doesn't use that as an excuse at all," Nall said. "He can catch the ball, he can actually punt the ball, so he hasn't let that

arm be any kind of an inconvenience."

Taylor's biggest concern entering college football was not whether he could kick, but whether he could handle the physical demands of it.

He had not done much upper body workouts and was nervous about keeping up with the team's training.

Elon's staff worked with him to find alternative exercises, including single-arm workouts, that allowed him to train alongside his teammates.

Walking into the season he knew his opportunities would be limited so his goal was to continue improving, contribute to the team and make the most of his opportunity on the field.

Taylor currently handles kickoffs for the team, helping Elon through some of their first games of the season and ultimately establish themselves as tied for the conference lead in touchbacks.

"To be able to do kickoffs is everything I could have wished for so far," Taylor said.

As a young athlete, Taylor saw another kicker with a limb difference competing at a high level. That player showed him that athletes with limb differences could find a place in competitive sports.

"I would like to inspire more of you know the people like me and the younger generations to kind of step out of their comfort zone and take a shot at life," Taylor said. "You can't really wait for life to give you that opportunity."

Taylor said he hopes young athletes see him on the field and recognize they do not have to limit themselves based on what other people may think they can do.

"Just be free, be yourself, have fun, enjoy it," Taylor said. "Because most people think about themselves a lot more than they're going to be thinking about you."

Nall said he sees a future at Elon that could extend well beyond his freshman season.

"I think Leo has a chance to be a phenomenal kicker," Nall said

Nall said Taylor has the work ethic, discipline and talent to become one of the program's standout kickers by the time he graduates.

But Taylor is not looking that far ahead. Each kickoff is another opportunity to compete, improve and another chance for a younger athlete watching from the stand to see what's possible.

Kathan Gandhi contributed to the reporting of this story



Elon University freshman kicker Leo Taylor stands on the field during Elon's game against the University of Maine on Sept. 26 at Rhodes Stadium.

ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

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