

THE PENDULUM

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Former Elon professor files wrongful termination lawsuit against university

Lawsuit alleges age-based remarks, university failure to report cheating

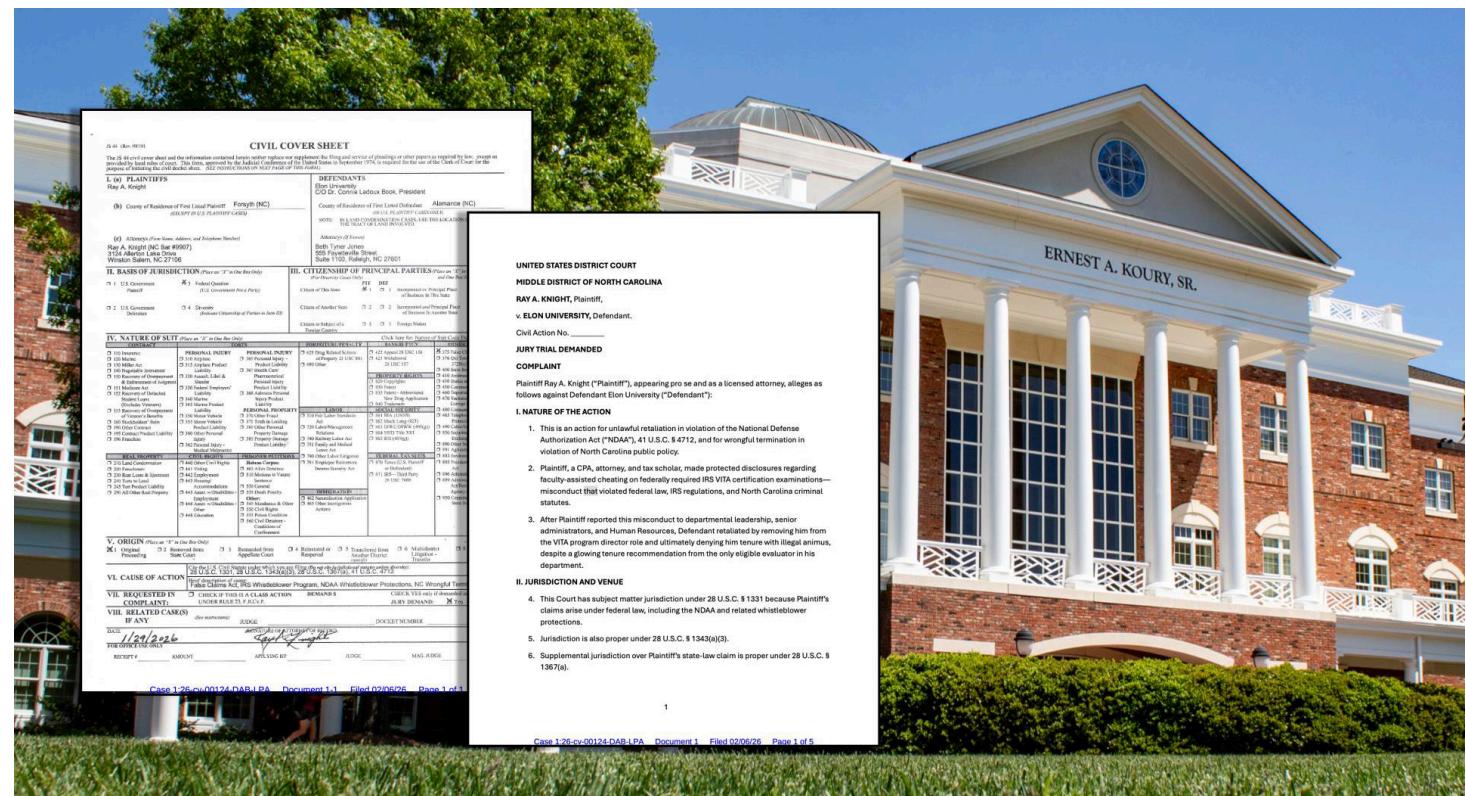
Fiona McAllister
Elon News Network

Former Elon professor of accounting Ray Knight has filed a federal lawsuit against Elon University, alleging the university retaliated against him for whistleblowing, wrongfully denied him tenure, wrongfully terminated his employment and violated both federal whistleblower protections and North Carolina public policy.

The lawsuit was filed Feb. 6 in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina.

Knight, who taught in the Martha and Spencer Love School of Business starting in 2017, alleges he discovered in 2021 that a faculty colleague had improperly provided students with answers to Internal Revenue Service Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) certification exams — required for participation in the federally sponsored tax-preparation program. Knight says in the lawsuit that he reported the misconduct to his department chair, dean and the university's human resources office.

According to the lawsuit, Knight was removed from his role as VITA program director a week after making his initial report and was later denied tenure despite receiving a favorable recommendation from his department evaluator. The suit also claims university officials failed to investigate or self-report the alleged misconduct to the IRS or the business school accreditor, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.



Former Elon professor of accounting Ray Knight filed a federal lawsuit complaint against Elon University on Feb. 6, 2026.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY FIONA MCALLISTER

Knight, who according to the lawsuit is a certified public accountant and attorney, did not respond to Elon News Network's request for comment. Elon University spokesperson Eric Townsend said that Elon University does not comment on pending litigation to which it is a party.

Knight filed the lawsuit without an attorney and seeks reinstatement or front pay, back pay, compensatory and punitive damages, and a favorable letter of reference.

The lawsuit also cites age-related comments by senior administrators and faculty as claims of discriminatory motive. The lawsuit quotes a third-hand account saying Knight "would be gone in two years" because he "was of that age" and later saying that Knight "would not be granted tenure."

Knight submitted his tenure application in Fall 2022, according to the lawsuit, and was denied tenure in March 2023 — ending his employment at the university.

This is the second federal lawsuit in the past 10 years involving a former Elon professor within the business school. Former assistant professor of business Michael Rodriguez sued Elon in January 2017, claiming discrimination after he was not granted tenure. Elon University won the lawsuit against Rodriguez after an appellate court agreed with the district court's summary judgment in favor of the university.

Community funds anti-child exploitation project

The Invictus Project supports multiagency task force, Alamance provides 2 full-time officers

Anjolina Fantaroni
Elon News Network

As a mother and Vice President of Development for the Invictus Project, Whitney Miller said there was no way she could ignore child exploitation.

"This is a fight for my children, but it's a fight for every other child that stands alongside my child, because this is something that you know to see it and know it means you can no longer turn a blind eye to it," Miller said.

The Invictus Project is a nonprofit organization that supports the Invictus Task Force — a multiagency uniting Randolph, Alamance, Davidson and Forsyth County Sheriff's Offices with Homeland Security Investigations and the State Bureau of Investigation. The task force works to protect children from sexual exploitation and trafficking.

The project supports law enforcement with funding technology and tools — such as data-extraction software Cellebrite Mobile Forensics and Magnet GrayKey — needed to work cases. Miller also said the project works on the educational side, educating the community about predator behaviors while law enforcement deals with the behaviors.



Whitney Miller, vice president of development for the Invictus Project, talks to the crowd Jan. 20 at Trailhead Church about child exploitation on social media.

However, funding is raised entirely by the community, with donations coming from people wanting to get involved.

"I think what it is, is once our community hears and understands the magnitude of the problem, what's happening in our own backyard, they feel compelled to find a way to do something about it," Miller said.

According to data from the Invictus Project's

website, 1 in 5 children have admitted to being contacted by or solicited by an online predator — and there are 84.9 million known images of child sexual abuse material being traded on the internet.

Miller said that much of the project's funding comes from small, local grants, as well as individual donors including parents who recognize their children are vulnerable.

"They want to find a way to help move the mission ahead and help other parents be aware of what these concerns are and what's happening," Miller said.

With events such as Teens: It's Time to Talk, and It's Time to Talk, the project has educated the Alamance County community with two events in the past month on the importance of monitoring children's technology and building a bridge between communication with parents around topics that tend to be very difficult. The events give the community a safe space to begin conversations around what they see online and how predators connect with youth, according to Miller.

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THIS IS A FIGHT FOR MY CHILDREN, BUT IT'S A FIGHT FOR EVERY OTHER CHILD THAT STANDS ALONGSIDE MY CHILD.

WHITNEY MILLER
VICE PRESIDENT FOR THE INVICTUS PROJECT

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THE PENDULUM

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ENN seeks to inspire, entertain and inform the Elon community by providing a voice for students and faculty, as well as serve as a forum for the meaningful exchange of ideas.

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ENN is committed to accurate coverage. When factual errors are made, we correct them promptly and in full, both online and in print. Online corrections state the error and the change at the top of the article. Corrections from the previous week's print edition appear on this page.

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CORRECTIONS

In the Feb. 11 edition of The Pendulum, the article "Memory of Alamance County lynching victims lingers as coalition educates community" stated in the story that Elon College President William Harper was a part of the mob that killed John Jeffries. He was not a part of this mob, but rather a different group that unsuccessfully attempted to locate Jeffries for a legal arrest.

Elon News Network regrets this error.

School of Education classrooms, offices move as Mooney renovations progress

Renovations expected to be ready by Fall 2026

Lyda Cosgrove
Elon News Network

Renovations to Elon University's Mooney Building are in progress after it closed at the beginning of Winter Term. The building's closure was announced Jan. 8 and renovations officially began Jan. 14. All upgrades are expected to be finished by the end of summer in time for the fall semester.

The planned renovations include replacing first and second floor windows, replacing the heating, ventilation and air conditioning system and consulting with an external professional engineer about gutters, building drainage and water intrusion.

The new HVAC system installation was ordered during the fall semester, so the updates had been planned. Because replacing the HVAC system requires removing ceilings, construction would have been too disruptive to hold classes in the building, according to Ann Bullock, the dean of Dr. Jo Watts Williams School of Education.

"Rather than implement these upgrades over time, the decision was made to close the Mooney Building beginning Winter Term 2026, continuing through the Spring 2026 semester and much of Summer 2026, so that planned upgrades can take place concurrently, and in time for the building to reopen in Fall 2026," Bullock wrote in an email to Elon faculty and staff Jan. 29.

Mooney, built in 1926, has not been renovated since 1999, when it became the official building for the School of Education. Bullock said she's been requesting window replacements since she first became dean in 2016. The main issue prompting the remodel was the HVAC system. With several separate units throughout the building, some classrooms could be hot while others were cold, outages happened many different times and the upkeep was no longer worth it, according to Bullock. Now that renovations are in progress, Bullock emphasized the university's support and responsiveness to the need for updates.

Mooney has been the primary building for education courses and faculty offices since 1999, requiring several temporary relocations for the spring semester. Education courses are now held in other buildings around campus, mainly in the Historic Neighborhood, including Powell, Long, Carlton, Alamance and Duke. A few courses are being held in the Koury Athletic Center, Sankey, Global Neighborhood buildings and Koenigsberger



LYDA COSGROVE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Construction workers work on the renovations to the Mooney Building on Feb. 10.

Learning Center.

Freshman Joshua Pollack, an elementary education student and teaching fellow, said he and most of his peers feel inconvenienced by the closure and relocations.

"For example, in my science elementary ed class, normally our professor would have all of his stuff with him in his classroom, but because his office is now in Koury and our class is in one of the business buildings, he doesn't have access to a lot of his stuff," Pollack said.

Still, Pollack is excited to see the renovations, which he said he felt were needed.

The team offices for the Center for Access & Success, which include Elon's outreach programs such as It Takes a Village, Elon Academy, Odyssey Scholars and First Generation Student Support Services, have been moved to McCoy Commons 212 in the Oaks Neighborhood.

The majority of teaching faculty, program leadership, administrative staff and some faculty without fixed offices are now in the second floor offices of the Koury Athletic Center. The Office of the Dean, Teaching Fellows Office and Curriculum Resources Center are being housed in the basement of the

Powell Building.

The School of Education's Curriculum Resources Center provides education-specific materials such as toys and books for students to bring when working in classrooms, making up over a third of Mooney's first floor. Some of the resources have been moved to an off-campus storage site, while most were able to remain with Allison Keill, the director of the CRC and associate librarian, in her temporary Powell office, according to Bullock.

"With a little bit of time and communication, students have still been able to get what they need, when they need it," Bullock told Elon News Network.

The relocation hasn't changed the student-faculty relationships and communities, Bullock said. Teaching Fellows Director Erin Hone and Assistant Director Brittany Roberts have made a point to still create a welcoming communal space for education majors despite the move to the Powell basement, complete with couches and candy.

"Everyone has had a really good attitude," Bullock said of the faculty and staff's relocation. "The situation is not optimal, but everyone's met it with a can-do attitude."

Funding supports data extraction softwares

INVICTUS | from cover

With events such as Teens: It's Time to Talk, and It's Time to Talk, the project has educated the Alamance County community with two events in the past month on the importance of monitoring children's technology and building a bridge between communication with parents around topics that tend to be very difficult. The events give the community a safe space to begin conversations around what they see online and how predators connect with youth, according to Miller.

Alamance County Sheriff Terry Johnson said child predators are a concern in communities across North Carolina, including Alamance County, but the task force works to catch individuals through undercover operations. He said the Alamance County Sheriff's Office provides two full-time officers to the task force.

"Right now, our county and the counties in North Carolina have a ton of predators," Johnson said. We also have a lot of predators from out of state making contact, trying to pose as a young boy, wanting to meet a young girl, et cetera. We're trying to stay on top of it, the best

we can. Just like in January, we arrested 23 sexual predators just here in Alamance County. And there's plenty more out there that we're still working on."

The Alamance County Sheriff's Office's Invictus Task Force arrested 23 individuals during a two-week-long operation they titled "Operation Ghost Wire" from Oct. 13 through Oct. 24, 2025. According to the press release, the individuals who were arrested "either traveled with the intent to engage in sexual contact with a minor, solicited sexual contact from whom they believed to be a minor child and/or were uploading or downloading child sex abuse material."

The project offers a service for teens called "Take it Down," a resource that helps teens remove online nude, partially nude or sexually explicit photos and videos taken before they were 18 years old. Johnson said the project raises awareness of child exploitation and the risks associated with social media.

"These kids get on that computer, get on that cell phone," Johnson said. "Parents are not checking their computers, not checking their cell phones, not paying attention, paying attention, to what their kids are doing, and that's where we lose

kids to predators."

Johnson referenced a 2021 kidnapping case in which a 14-year-old girl from Davidson County was taken from her home by an adult man and brought to Arkansas. Johnson said an Arkansas officer saw the be-on-the-lookout alert issued by North Carolina authorities and returned the girl back to the state. The predator died due to what appeared to be a self-inflicted gunshot wound after a police pursuit.

According to the Invictus Project's website, 500,000 predators scour the internet daily, targeting ages 12 to 15.

"These predators are not just in Alamance County, or Forsyth County or Randolph County," Johnson said. "They're all over the country, and they will come to come areas where these little girls are, trick them into thinking they're meeting a nice young man, et cetera."

For more information

Visit www.TheInvictusProject.org to learn more about the Invictus Project. If you believe you or someone you know may be a victim of child exploitation call the national hotline for 24/7 assistance.

Call 1-888-373-7888 or text "HELP" to 233733

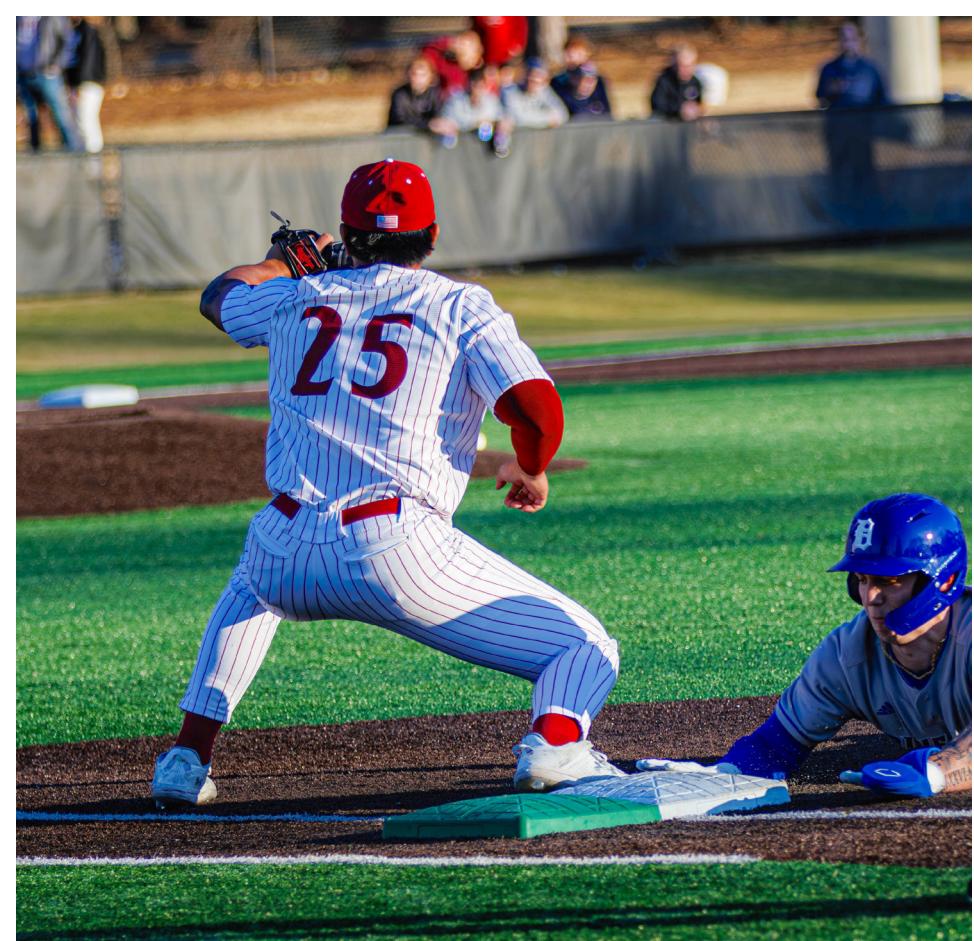


Members of Melanated Melodies, a student a cappella group, raise their fists at the end of their first song during a performance Feb. 11 at the Black Table Talk in McBride Gathering Space.

VENUS SOTO CASTANEDA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Whitney Miller, vice president of development for the Invictus Project, talks to teenagers about the safety of communication between them and parents on Feb. 15 at Trailhead Church. As a mother, Miller said there was no way she could ignore child exploitation. "This is a fight for my children, but it's a fight for every other child that stands alongside my child, because this is something that you know to see it and know it means you can no longer turn a blind eye to it," Miller said. Learn about the Invictus Project on pages 1 and 2.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Elon University junior 1B Jose Mariano attempts to get a University of Delaware player out after attempting to steal second base. The match took place on Feb. 13 at Latham Park. Elon won 13-1.



Officials with Ahold Delhaize USA and Food Lion break ground Feb. 16 on a new distribution plant in Guilford County, North Carolina. Melvin "Skip" Alston, chair of the Guilford County Board of Commissioners, emphasized the importance of the moment. "This is not just a groundbreaking, it's a statement," Alston said.



ABIGAIL HINES | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Senior Ryan Howard takes a shot on goal in Elon's 9-2 victory over East Carolina University on Feb. 6. Elon's men's club hockey team advanced to its second-ever playoff appearance with the win after a 2-8 season last year. Head coach Travis Harris credited the team's blend of new players and veteran leadership. "The youth on this team, between the current sophomores and freshman, has really carried us through some tough games, netting goals when we need them the most," Harris said. "But it's also the seniors we have that kept us consistent."

North Carolina implements new SNAP work requirements

Changes could impact more than 1 million North Carolinians who receive SNAP benefits

Trista Panagakos
Elon News Network

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program provides food assistance to lower-income individuals and families to help offset the cost of groceries. The program is funded by the federal government and state governments offset administrative costs. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, more than one million North Carolinians receive SNAP benefits.

SNAP has been reshaped by legislation signed by President Donald Trump over the summer. The bill — named the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” — placed new work requirements SNAP recipients must meet to receive the benefits. These work requirements have already been in effect for North Carolinian SNAP recipients since December.

The bill extended the work requirement age limit to 18 to 64 years old for able-bodied adults without dependents, the previous age limit was 18 to 54 years old. Work exemptions for parents with a child 18 years old and younger has been lowered to only include children under 14 years of age. Homeless people, veterans and those 18 to 24 years old who recently left foster care were previously exempt from work requirements, but no longer receive those exemptions.

To qualify for SNAP benefits, a person must prove they have spent 80 hours a month doing paid or unpaid work, volunteering, participating in job training, or a combination of the three.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated that in an average month, 2.4 million people nationwide will no longer participate in SNAP benefits over the 2025-34 period.

The Trump administration has cited fraud as a major reason for the SNAP overhaul. Professor of political science at North Carolina State University Steven Greene said while there may be a reasonable attempt to ensure no one commits fraud, there will still be people who are unable to get benefits they are entitled to because of bureaucratic hurdles.

“To some degree, that’s always going to be a trade off if you want to make 100% sure that nobody cheats the system, I can absolutely guarantee you that deserving people who qualify for and need the benefit will not be able to get it,” Greene said.



TRISTA PANAGAKOS | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A electronic benefit transfer sign displayed on the door of a Pit Stop gas station in Elon. EBTs allows individuals to purchase food via SNAP with a debit-like card.

Greene cited Medicaid as an example of how adding work requirements can save the program money but at the expense of qualified people not receiving the benefits because of how much time it takes to fill out paperwork.

“We have this idea that you shouldn’t go hungry in America, and a big way to prevent that is SNAP benefits, and if people are still going hungry, and if people who really need those benefits are not getting them because of the bureaucratic hurdles. We need to rethink that,” Greene said.

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services reported that as of April 2025, 24,925 people in Alamance County received SNAP benefits. With the new work requirements those on SNAP benefits in Alamance County may be affected and may have to rely on nonprofit organizations that offer food pantries and meal services in order to get groceries and meals. Allied Churches of Alamance County offers Joe’s Diner, a service which provides meals twice a day, five times a week. In the past year, ACAC served

over 30,000 meals to citizens.

Executive Director of Allied Church Jai Baker said the work requirements open an opportunity for people to volunteer at non-profit agencies to fulfill their work requirements. Baker did say there are extenuating circumstances that are not considered which may affect people’s ability to work.

“There’s a lot of logistics, I think at play, that when we just said blanket volunteerism in these 20 hours, I don’t think that the general population really understand that that’s going to be a logistical nightmare, and that could be nightmare for the person that’s receiving the SNAP benefit, or it could be a nightmare too for those agencies that are trying to help people become self sufficient and sustaining and receiving those benefits,” Baker said.

Baker said ACAC started receiving calls in January from people who wanted to volunteer. He said he expects other agencies across Alamance County are also experiencing an influx of people who want to

volunteer to keep up with the hours needed to receive SNAP benefits.

To maintain their operations ACAC accepts donations from the community and works with local grocery stores and restaurants to keep their kitchen stocked. They also apply for grants. Baker said the need for the grants may be higher for food pantries to support operations with an influx of people who are not on SNAP anymore, but that does not mean more grant money will become available.

Baker said he believed the government should focus on providing communities with access to grocery stores and fresh food sources.

“I also think in that we need to figure out how to make sure we’re revitalizing areas and we’re increasing areas that we need to keep access to fresh fruits and vegetables,” Baker said. “At the top, it needs to be a priority. Right? Do people have access to fresh fruits and vegetables? Can every part of the county, east, west, north and south have access to that type?”

Students forced to travel off campus for midterm primary elections

Elon is among a list of universities not hosting early voting for primaries

Abby Gravely
Elon News Network

Early voting for the 2026 midterm election primaries began Feb. 12, and Elon University is one of the many North Carolina colleges and universities not hosting an early voting site.

Elon University has hosted early voting at South Gym for recent presidential and midterm elections, though it has never hosted one for midterm primaries such as those coming up March 3, 2026.

On March 3, voters will select nominees for November’s U.S. Senate and House of Representatives elections, along with the North Carolina Court of Appeals and local races such as Alamance County Sheriff, Board of Commissioners and Clerk of Superior Court.

Assistant Dean of Campus Life and Director of the Kernodle Center for Civic Life Bob Frigo declined an interview, but wrote in a statement to Elon News Network that the Alamance County Board of Elections reached out in the fall of 2025 asking if the university would host an additional early voting site to accommodate a high expected voter



ETHAN WU | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Signs guide voters toward the South Gym entrance Oct. 25, 2024, on Elon’s South Campus. The Elon South Gym has been used an early voting site for past elections including in 2024, but will not be available for the upcoming midterm primaries.

turnout. While the university was willing to serve as a polling place, the North Carolina State Board of Elections struck down the request.

“We are disappointed that Elon University was not selected as an early voting site for the midterm primary elections,” Frigo wrote.

Frigo wrote that with the limited number of early voting sites, most voters will have to travel to one of Alamance

County’s three options: Kernodle Senior Center, Graham Recreation Center, or Mebane Arts and Community Center.

Early voting sites are the only locations that have “one-stop voting,” where citizens can register and vote all in one place.

Elon University is one addition to the list of North Carolina campuses not hosting early voting. The NCSBE also rejected early voting sites at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro; Western

Carolina University; and North Carolina A&T University.

Students at these universities, along with the North Carolina College Democrats sued the NCSBE over this issue, claiming in the lawsuit that on-campus early voting sites are “critical for overcoming the barriers that student voters face.” These barriers include a lack of access to personal transportation, little time to travel to and from voting sites and a lack of familiarity with geography surrounding their schools.

To limit these barriers, Elon University will provide transportation from campus to an early voting location at the Kernodle Senior Center on Feb. 21 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., according to an email to students from Vice President of Student Life Jon Dooley. On Election Day, transportation will be provided from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Alamance County early voting sites

Kernodle Senior Center
1535 S Mebane Street
Burlington, NC

Graham Recreation Center
311 College Street
Graham, NC

Mebane Arts and Community Center
633 Corregidor Street
Mebane, NC

Surrounded by sound



'Rent' transforms McCrary Theatre with immersive audio

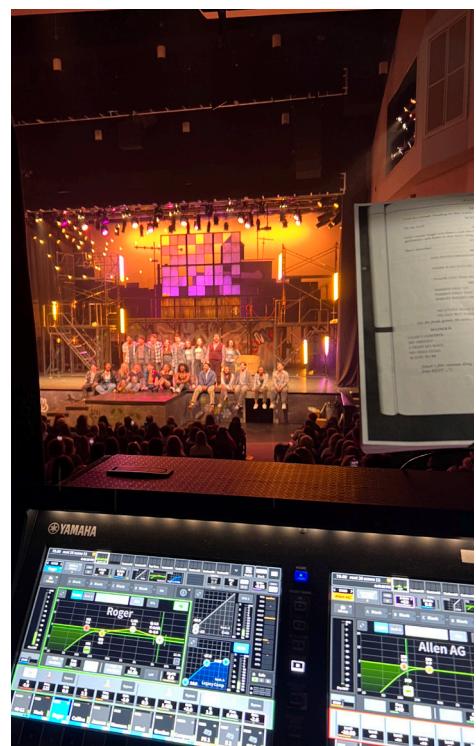
CHARLOTTE PFABE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon senior and music production and recording arts major Brandon Cericola helps design a 10-speaker sound for the Performing Arts Department's performance of "Rent" which ran Feb. 13 to Feb. 15. This is the first time an immersive sound system has been used in McCrary Theatre.



CHARLOTTE PFABE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

During the four performances of "Rent," Elon senior Brandon Cericola ran the audio board, which had nearly 84 different audio inputs. He said it was originally intimidating but after trial and error, he got over the learning curve.



COURTESY OF BRANDON CERICOLA

"Rent" was Elon senior Brandon Cericola's first time working with sound design for a musical. He has background in working with live sound and orchestral music production.



COURTESY OF BRANDON CERICOLA

Elon senior Brandon Cericola, alongside two mentors, designed the immersive sound setup. The three of them tested McCrary Theatre, which was not built for surround sound, using a laser measurement device to determine where to place the speakers.

Winter musical premieres the space's first audio setup of its kind

Charlotte Pfabe
Elon News Network

With 10 speakers and an immersive sound setup, audiences heard a different version of McCrary Theatre for Elon University's Performing Arts production of "Rent."

All four performances of "Rent" were sold out, according to Elon's Performing Arts website. The show ran from Feb. 13 to 15. This means that around 575 people watched and listened to the show each night and experienced the first-ever immersive audio setup in McCrary Theatre.

"Immersive audio gives you a lot more space to work with, so it allowed for certain room and cool things from a mixing perspective that we can't do with just a left and right stereo," said sound designer Brandon Cericola.

Cericola, an Elon senior, is majoring in music production and recording arts. Alongside two mentors, he designed the system.

Immersive audio setups come in many different forms and are often designed based on the dimensions of a specific room and the type of sound being played. This type of audio mixing allows sound to be heard from all directions, instead of only left and right, like what is typical in musical theater.

The system includes ten speakers — two in the front, closest to the stage on each side, two in the middle and two in the back of the theater, right before the balcony. The other four include two at the stage and two in the back on the balcony level.

The best seat in the house, or what Cericola called the "money seat," is right in the middle of the theater. This is where the sound from all the speakers meets, surrounding the listener with sound all around.

During rehearsals and while testing the sound design, Cericola said he would run between that seat and his audio booth in the back of the theater, making changes to the audio each time. He said the process was filled with trial and error, and after

each rehearsal, he took notes about what went well and what needed to change.

"It's been this constant feedback loop that has just improved every single night," Cericola said.

To test the space, Cericola said the team took detailed measurements of the theater. He said they used a laser measuring device, which records how long it takes for sound waves to bounce off of the surfaces in a space. Then, Cericola said they crunched some numbers to determine how much to delay each speaker, so there were no unwanted overlaps between the speakers.

Comb filtering was one of the unwanted issues. According to Sweetwater Sound, comb filtering happens when the same sound arrives at different times at a listener's ears with a very small delay between the signals. The delay is only a few milliseconds, but it causes certain frequencies to be canceled out and others to be amplified.

Cericola said that since McCrary Theatre wasn't built to be an immersive soundscape, there were some limitations to the design, such as the balcony not having the same surround sound setup as the floor.

"Rent" was the first time Cericola worked as a sound designer for a musical. He said it was much different than his experience in orchestral sound.

"There was a huge learning curve involved in that," Cericola said. "How do you manage 22 mics when there's 22 people belting at the same time? Where do you put things? You have all these options in the freedom of choice, which can turn into a decision paralysis."

With nearly 84 different audio inputs, between the live band and actors, Cericola decided to chunk the channels into 11 different "scenes" so that he had 24 buttons to manage at once.

"It's a huge amount to manage, and no human can manage, like, 120 buttons at once," Cericola said.

However, even though the process was challenging, he said the hard work paid off.

"Throughout the show, we have these big moments where the immersive just lets the audience feel like they're a part of the cast in a way," Cericola said. "And that they're included in the show, whether that's felt or heard or experienced."

Students find community through faith

Campus organizations provide community, flexibility for students navigating faith, college life

Mia Torres
Elon News Network

Through a variety of faith-based organizations, Elon University students are finding ways to remain connected to their beliefs while balancing coursework and extracurricular commitments.

The Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life is used by students on campus to explore different religious worldviews and identities. They offer many ways to get involved on campus through religious organizations, including Catholic Campus Ministry; Chabad; Hillel; Elon Muslim Society; InterVarsity Christian Fellowship; and Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Friends.

Elon University is a multifaith campus. According to the fall 2025 registrar's report, Elon's total student body practices 41 different religious traditions. The most commonly practiced faith on Elon's campus is Catholicism, with 17.1% of students.

Elon senior Brooke Gustafson is the community director for InterVarsity, a nondenominational Christian ministry. She said having the organization on campus is especially meaningful because it brings together students from diverse backgrounds.

"There are people from, like, so many places across the world – different majors, passions and identities," Gustafson said. "And all of us are, like, united on the same purpose, which is Christ."

Gustafson said college is a place where students aren't under the influence of their parents and can find out who they are independently.

"It's finally this time where we get to explore ourselves," Gustafson said.

Elon senior Ellie Griffin, a student leader for InterVarsity, said the ministry makes an effort to build community on campus through weekly small groups, large-group worship and Bible studies, while also encouraging students to grow deeper in the word and apply faith in their own lives.

"We make an effort to build community on campus while also helping students grow deeper in the word and connect with their own faith and learn more about Jesus," Griffin said.

According to the Truitt Center, Jewish student organizations such as Hillel and Chabad emphasize consistency and community for students navigating busy academic schedules. Hillel, a student-led and staff-supported organization, serves Jewish students across a wide spectrum of religious observance.

Co-President of Hillel and Elon senior Zoe Klein said Hillel is where students find a community to connect with.

Klein said Hillel serves students with varying relationships to Judaism, including both observant individuals and those who participate for social reasons.

"That's where they find a community to connect with," Klein said.

Hillel operates out of a house on campus, which Klein said contributes to its welcoming and accessible environment. The space includes a kitchen, living room

and study areas where students can gather outside of formal events.

"If I could just sit on the couch and get things done and have a snack while I'm at it, that's how I really started becoming involved," Klein said.

The organization hosts a range of events throughout the year, including Shabbat dinners and celebrations for major Jewish holidays such as Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Passover. Klein said these moments are especially meaningful for students celebrating away from home for the first time.

Klein also said Hillel encourages flexible participation, allowing students to attend events when they can or simply use the space to study.

"You don't have to stay for an entire event," Klein said. "You can come to what you can."

Chabad at Elon also provides Jewish students with a home-like environment, offering weekly Shabbat dinners, holiday observances and daily meals during major religious periods. Elon senior Abby Krause, Chabad co-student leader, described the organization as a "home away from home," emphasizing the importance of community.

"There's a lot of big holidays that usually you're with your family for but we're at school for, and so getting to have somewhere to go and still be able to celebrate all the traditions and get all parts of that, and eat all the right foods and do all the right things and still participate in the Jewish holidays is great," Krause said.

The Elon Muslim Society offers opportunities to practice faith across

campus. The organization hosts weekly Jum'ah prayers on Fridays, along with community meals and educational events such as Chat and Chai, which welcomes both Muslim and non-Muslim students.

Elon senior Fatmata Bah, vice president of the Elon Muslim Society, said having set times for prayer and gathering helps students balance school and faith.

"Having that sort of set in stone helps me balance my faith because I know I can pray and be around people in a similar community," Fatmata said.

The organization also collaborates with the Truitt Center to host celebrations for Ramadan and Eid, bringing together students, staff, faculty and members of the local community.

Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Friends — known as LEAF — focuses on inclusivity and faith exploration, offering worship services, Bible studies and informal coffee hours designed to fit into students' schedules.

Sophomore River Cranford, treasurer of LEAF, said the organization creates a low-pressure environment for students at all stages of faith.

"It's okay to ask questions," Cranford said. "You don't have to have everything figured out."

Across campus, leaders from faith-based organizations emphasized flexibility, accessibility and community as essential tools for helping students manage their spiritual lives alongside academic demands. By offering both structured worship and informal gathering spaces, these groups aim to support students navigating faith during a formative period of independence.



Sophomore Tamar Kalisher prepares food for Shabbat dinner Feb. 6 at the Sklut Hillel Center.



Associate professor of education Stephen Byrd leads InterVarsity bible study Feb. 4.



Seniors Em Orendorff and Audrey Nott engage in discussion with peers at InterVarsity community night Feb. 4.



Flags hanging in the Sklut Hillel Center show community and acceptance.

THE ROOKIES

Freshman duo grows up fast for Phoenix



KATHAN GANDHI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Freshman Ashanti Fox fires from long distance against the College of Charleston on Jan. 30.

Ashanti Fox



537

Number of minutes played by Ashanti Fox this season, the most of any player on the women's basketball team this season.

Impactful rookies continue to excel in blossoming roles

Kathan Gandhi
Elon News Network

In a season defined by adjustment, opportunity and growth, two rookies have helped steady Elon women's basketball when it mattered most.

Freshman center Tamia Watkins controls the paint and freshman guard Ashanti Fox controls the pace. The rookies have combined to earn Coastal Athletic Association Rookie of the Week honors for four straight weeks, going back to Jan. 19.

Together, they represent both the present and the future of the Phoenix.

Owning the glass

Not long ago at Andrew Jackson High School in Kershaw, South Carolina, Watkins could dominate games on sheer presence alone.

"High school was very easy for me, because I was bigger than the majority of people I played with," Watkins said. "I could just go down in the paint and score with ease. Sometimes I would have three people on me, and I could still do it."

Watkins' 6'2" frame led her to be the school's all-time leading scorer and a 2AA conference state champion. But at the Division I level, it hasn't been as simple. That's exactly why her impact has been so impressive.

The freshman center is averaging 7.7 points per game while leading Elon in rebounds. Her 5.1 rebounds per game is the most for any rookie in the CAA, and second-most by an Elon rookie in the last decade.

Head coach Charlotte Smith said the growing play of Watkins is essential for the team.

"It's important for us to get those rebounds," Smith said. "If we can do that consistently, we really have a chance of winning."

Over a recent two-week stretch, she averaged 14 points and 8 rebounds per game, earning back-to-back CAA Rookie of the Week honors on Feb. 2 and Feb. 9.

For an "undersized big," as she describes herself, success has required a different formula: preparation and humility.

"You really have to study that player," Watkins said of facing bigger post players. "Which side does she like to go to? Is she quick on her feet? You'd rather know what's going to happen beforehand than be surprised."

The speed of the college game forced her to adapt quickly. Playing time fluctuates. Every possession demands discipline.

"Coach says that everybody has a role on the team, and you have to be perfect in that role," Watkins said. "You'll be in high school, you can just do everything. When you come to college, you have to play in the team."

She defines her role as a "connector" — a versatile presence who rebounds, passes and scores when needed. If her shot isn't falling, she crashes the glass. If a teammate has the hot hand, she feeds them.

That team-first mentality mirrors what head coach Charlotte Smith has instilled in her.

"She's helping me learn to become a leader, and just to know that everything's not about you," Watkins said. "Sometimes you have to sacrifice yourself to become something better or help other people."

The result has been steady growth, and lately, dominance on the boards.

"I just wanted to be dominant," Watkins said of her recent stretch. "I wanted to show my coaches and teammates I can be that player for y'all."

Seizing the moment

While Watkins has carved out her role inside, Fox has embraced a different kind of responsibility.

The 5'7" guard from Vass, North Carolina, was named CAA Rookie of the Week in back-to-back weeks earlier this season on Jan. 19 and Jan. 26. She's found success as Elon's main option off the bench, leading the Phoenix in minutes played without ever being a starter.

When sophomore Jayda Angel went down with a season-ending injury early in the year, Fox's role expanded immediately.

"Once that happened, I had to switch my mentality from freshman to upperclassman," Fox said. "It was a big jump."

That shift meant more than scoring. It meant running the offense, organizing sets, and providing energy. It's a challenge that Smith said was huge for the program.

"She's got the ability to make those shots that we need in big moments," Smith said.

Fox's path to this moment wasn't seamless. Summer injuries and preseason illness left her feeling "three weeks behind" when practices intensified. Conditioning became a priority. So did trust.

"Coach Smith's confidence and trust in me is number one," Fox said. "When I came back from my injuries, I didn't have a lot of trust in myself."

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I HAD TO SWITCH MY MENTALITY FROM FRESHMAN TO UPPERCASSMAN. IT WAS A BIG JUMP.

ASHANTI FOX
ELON WOMEN'S BASKETBALL GUARD



KATHAN GANDHI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Freshman Tamia Watkins breaks away from the defense to sink a transition lay-up against the College of Charleston on Jan. 30

Tamia Watkins



5.1

Number of rebounds per game by Tamia Watkins, the second-most by an Elon women's basketball rookie in the last decade.

"We don't want to be playing our best basketball in February or January," Fox said. "You want to be playing your best basketball in March."

Elon currently ranks 7th in CAA with a 6-6 conference record.

Watkins echoed the same sentiment, emphasizing growth after losses and learning from adversity in the film room.

"I just want to do whatever it takes to win," she said.



TRANSFER TRACKER

Football team's outgoing, incoming players from 2026 transfer portal

COURTESY OF ELON ATHLETICS

Freshman quarterback Brady Stober, a new transfer to Elon University football, sets back to throw in an offseason practice.

Phoenix roster loses 15 players, brings in 6

Kathan Gandhi
Elon News Network

When the college football transfer portal closed on Jan. 16, Elon football didn't just lose names on a roster – it lost faces of a season and production that powered the Phoenix through 2025.

In total, Elon lost 15 players in this portal, six more than last year. Elon's biggest departure looms at quarterback.

Redshirt freshman Landen Clark's lone season as Elon's starter felt anything but temporary. He threw for 2,231 yards, accounted for 29 total touchdowns and brought an edge to the offense that earned him Coastal Athletic Association Co-Offensive Rookie of the Year honors. For much of 2025, the offense ran through Clark's arm and legs. Now, after Clark transferred to Louisiana State University, a Power 4 school that last won the national championship in 2020, it'll belong to someone else.

Backup quarterback Marco Lainez also moved on. After transferring from the University of Iowa and spending 2025 behind Clark, Lainez thanked Elon on social media for giving him a "place to hang his pads" while he worked his way back to full health.

On top of losing the team's best arms, Elon lost its most productive pass catcher.

If there was a single snapshot of Elon's 2025 season, it might be sophomore Isaiah Fuhrmann racing 97 yards for a game-winning touchdown against Campbell University. Once a zero-star recruit out of high school, Fuhrmann became the Phoenix's most dangerous receiving threat and transformed into a 3-star prospect entering the portal. In 2026, he'll take that rise to the Georgia Institute of Technology, another Power

Four program.

The running game will take a hit, too.

Sophomore running back TJ Thomas Jr. — a 2024 freshman All-American — gained 1,952 total yards during his two seasons at Elon, splitting carries with senior Jimmyll Williams. He'll now play for the University of Minnesota.

Up front, five offensive linemen entered the portal, including consistent starters Luke Duska, Ahmarion McLeod and Brayden Walker. Their departures leave holes that Elon sought to replace in the portal.

Elon's defense lost many key departures as well. Defensive lineman Kahmari Brown, a second-team All-American in 2025, departs after a breakout sophomore campaign. The only CAA player with double-digit sacks now heads to the University of Iowa.

Five defensive backs also exited, including Brycen Scott, who appeared in 20 games over two seasons. Linebackers Asher Cunningham and Gavin Brandwood round out the departures, transferring to Utah State and Davidson, respectively.

Head coach Tony Trisciani said that the state of Elon football is very healthy when it comes to transfers.

"We have some of the lowest numbers of transfers in Division I football," Trisciani said. "Last year we only had 9, the year before that it was only 8. We just don't have many."

Despite the lower transfer numbers, Elon lost 11 impact starters to the portal and graduation.

But as the roster thinned, Trisciani went to work. Six new transfers now arrive in Elon's locker room.

Quarterback Brady Stober, a North Carolina native, comes in after a freshman season at Samford University. A former 3-star recruit who scored nine total touchdowns in five starts his rookie year, Stober brings both pedigree

and production to a quarterback room suddenly wide open.

Trisciani said the Phoenix tried to recruit Stober out of high school. Elon was the quarterback's first official college offer.

"When the coaching staff changed at Samford, we saw it as our opportunity to take another shot at Brady," Trisciani said. "He was a highly productive and efficient and winning quarterback in high school."

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WE HAVE SOME OF THE LOWEST NUMBERS OF TRANSFERS IN DIVISION I FOOTBALL.

TONY TRISCIANI
ELON FOOTBALL HEAD COACH

After losing multiple veterans on the offensive line, Trisciani said it was a priority to bring in experienced replacements. Ethan Gonzalez Bonilla arrives from Christopher Newport University after starting 11 games at left tackle and helping lead the Captains to a 10-0 record. He earned first-team New Jersey Athletic Conference honors in 2025. Gabe Navarro, who most recently played at North Carolina A&T after beginning his career at Virginia State, adds 22 career starts and in-conference familiarity.

"It was important, because we're a relatively young group on the offensive line," Trisciani said. "We're bringing back four guys with starting experience, and now adding on two more."

Trisciani said connections are

important when gauging players in the portal. This was the second time Elon eyed Navarro, after bringing him in for a workout when he transferred from Virginia State.

Elon also has connections to Jack Cooper, safeties coach at the University of Wisconsin. That's how Trisciani learned of redshirt freshman Remington Moss, a former 4-star defensive back coming out of high school.

Trisciani said Moss' versatility is exciting for the defense. His ability to flex between corner and safety with a 6'1" frame will be an important factor in the upcoming season.

Linebacker Derek Hite transfers from the Virginia Military Institute after tallying 61 tackles and two sacks his freshman year. Nick Jones joins from Hampton, looking for his first collegiate snaps after a redshirt freshman season.

According to Trisciani, Elon prepares some of its players to transfer to higher-respected conferences.

"We've done a great job developing in the evaluation process and development to where now it's hard to keep some of our top players," Trisciani said. "If they play at a high level and they have the measurables, then they'll have some opportunities to transfer up. What we want to do is try to get them an Elon degree first, and then go on and use their additional years of eligibility at a Power-4 program."

In response, the team tries to anticipate the gaps it'll need to fill and reach out to players in the portal. Although Elon's incoming transfer class is smaller than its departures, Trisciani said it was important to get the right guys.

"If we're bringing in five or six guys, we can handle that," Trisciani said. "We just want to put our arms around them and love them. Like step-brothers."

The 2026 roster will look different, younger in some spots, unproven in others, but reshaped with intention.