

THE PENDULUM

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Commencement Edition Class of 2026

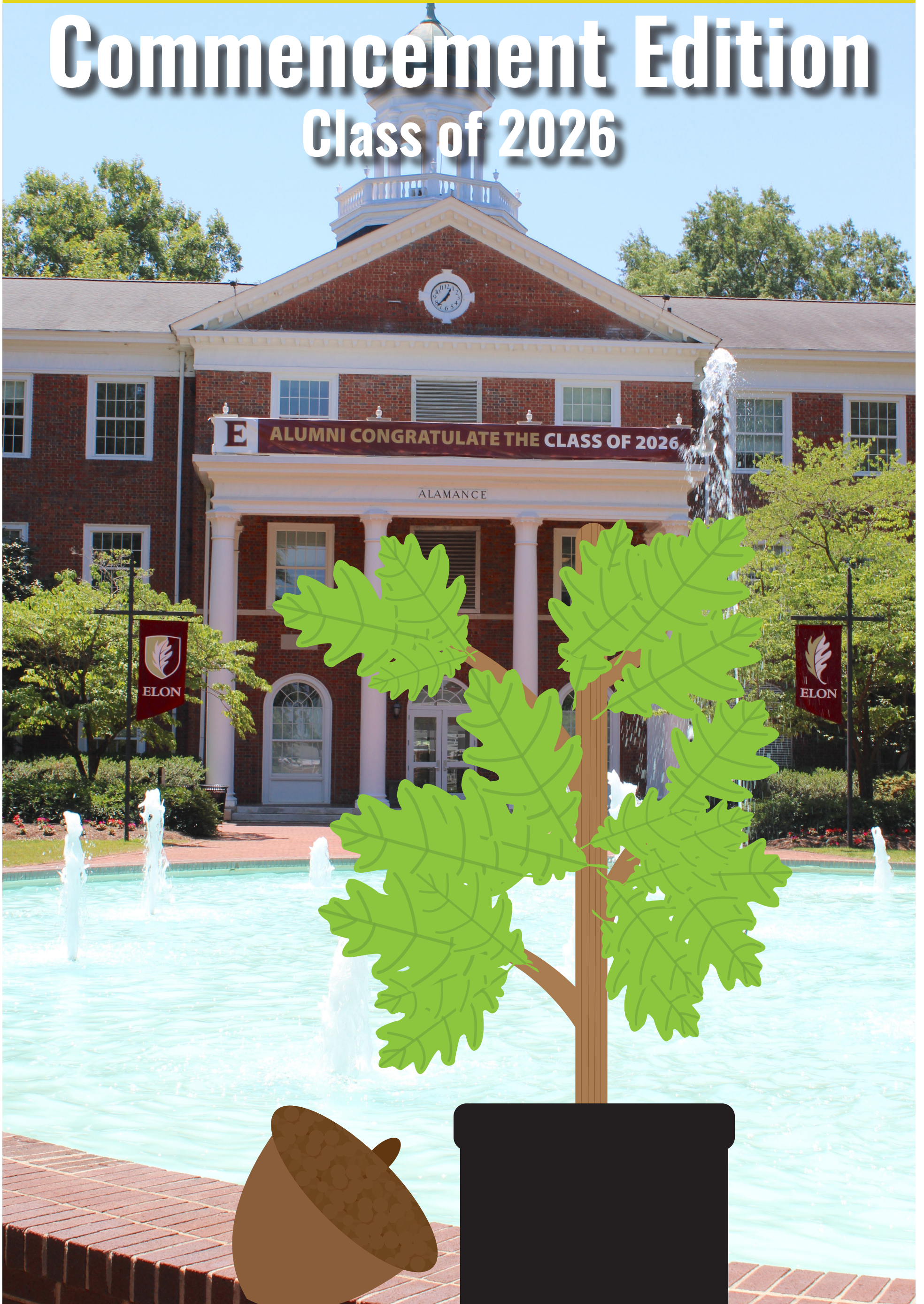


PHOTO AND DESIGN BY MEGAN WALSH

THE PENDULUM

A PUBLICATION OF

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Elon News Network is a daily news organization that includes a newspaper, website, broadcasts and podcasts. Letters to the editor are welcome and should be typed, signed and emailed to staff@elonnewsnetwork.com as Word documents.

ENN reserves the right to edit obscene and potentially libelous material. Lengthy letters may be trimmed to fit. All submissions become the property of ENN and will not be returned.

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Anjolina Fantaroni and Megan Walsh contributed to the copy editing of this edition. Megan Walsh contributed to the design of this edition.

EDITORIAL POLICY:

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.

CORRECTIONS POLICY:

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.

Contact corrections@elonnewsnetwork.com to report a correction or a concern.

CORRECTIONS

The article, "Students weigh HBCU's, PWIs in college decisions," in the May 6 edition of the Pendulum incorrectly referred to Morehouse College.

The article, "Transfer Tracker: Elon adds 4 new members to men's basketball," in the May 6 edition of the Pendulum incorrectly stated the number of transfers of transfers leaving and joining Elon. Five players are transferring to Elon, and four players left. The article also incorrectly referred to each transfer in the photo caption. The caption referred to the players in right to left order, not left to right.

The article, "NC teacher pay deceased since 2024-25 school year," in the May 6 edition of the Pendulum incorrectly referred to take home pay as the same thing as teacher's salaries.

Elon News Network regrets these errors.

Class of 2026: Life after commencement

Alumni Affinity Networks

Affinity networks, led by alumni and supported by Office of Alumni Engagement staff members, help engage alumni who share common identities and connections.

Elon Latinx/Hispanic Alumni Network

The Elon/Latnix/Hispanic Alumni Network, founded in 2017, connects alumni through in-person and online events. The network strives to act as a support system, and helps promote and facilitate the interests and activities of Latnix/Hispanic alumni.

Elon Black Alumni Network

The Elon Black Alumni Network aims to represent the interests of Black alumni and providing professional development opportunities. EBAN works with current Elon students through the Center for Race, Ethnicity and Diversity Education, the Phillips-Perry Black Excellence Awards and the Donning of the Kente Ceremony.

LGBTQIA Alumni Network

The LGBTQIA Alumni Network helps build community between LGBTQIA alumni and the university and promotes an inclusive environment at Elon. The network aims to promote the LGBTQIA presence on campus, and help educate the university on LGBTQIA issues. The LGBTQIA Alumni Network also manages Elon's LGBTQIA Community Enrichment Awards, which recognizes alumni, faculty, staff and students who uplift LGBTQIA causes on campus.

Alumni Resources

All Elon alumni have free access to career coaching services from the Office of Alumni Engagement and the Student Professional Development Center. Coaching sessions can be about career goals, refining resumes, or navigating career transitions. To schedule an appointment with Associate Director of Career Services Lasse Palomaki, go online to www.elon.edu/u/alumni.

Alumni can use the Career Search Foundations, a resource library that guides alumni through each stage of the job search with a self-paced, asynchronous course that offers strategies and exercises on things like resume building and interview success.

The Office of Alumni Engagement hosts professional development, on-demand webinars periodically through the year. For more information, visit the alumni event calendar online.

Elon has over 25 regional alumni chapters across the country, which provide alumni with ways to stay connected to Elon through events with other alumni.

Alumni Chapters

- Atlanta, GA
- Asheville, NC
- Baltimore, MD
- Boston, MA
- Charleston, SC
- Charlotte, NC
- Chicago, IL
- Cincinnati, OH
- Columbus, OH
- Dallas, TX
- Denver, CO
- Jacksonville, FL
- London, UK
- Los Angeles, CA
- Nashville, TN
- New York City, NY
- Orlando, FL
- Philadelphia, PA
- Piedmont, NC
- Pittsburgh, PA
- Richmond, VA
- San Francisco, CA
- South Florida
- Stamford, CT
- Tampa Bay, FL
- Triangle, NC
- Washington, D.C.
- Wilmington, NC

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ENN FILE PHOTO

As Elon seniors prepare to graduate May 22, a variety of professional development resources will begin to be accessible to them as alumni.

Homecoming

Elon's annual Homecoming & Reunion Weekend in 2026 is set to be held Oct. 9 and 10. Signature events include a special edition of College Coffee, the "Rock the Block" block party and an alumni tailgate before Elon football's game against Wofford College on Oct. 10 at Rhodes Stadium.

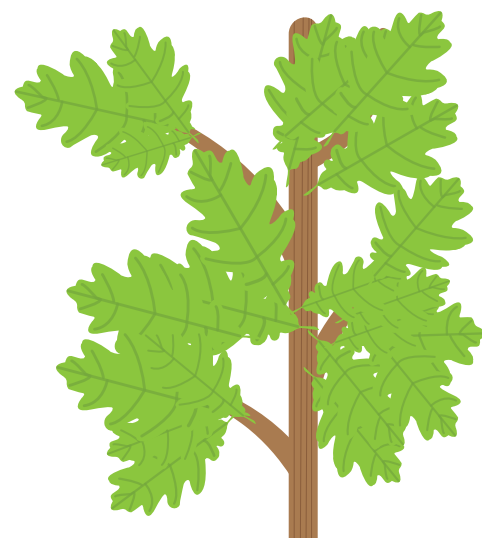


JOJO LIEBREICH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Then redshirt sophomore tight end Dylan Magzu runs for a first down against the Villanova defense Oct. 11, 2025 at Rhodes Stadium. Elon lost their annual Homecoming game 29-21. An Elon football home game is one of the annual signature events for the weekend. The 2026 Homecoming game is set to take place Oct. 10 against Wofford College.

Saplings

Each Elon graduate will receive an oak sapling, symbolizing their growth throughout their time at the university and the growth they will experience as lifelong learners. The tradition began in 1991 when Furman Moseley '56 gave each member of the graduating class a redwood sapling. Graduates can map their sapling on the Elon Alumni website to help show the reach of Elon's national footprint, even if it has died or you no longer live where it was planted. Students received the saplings at the Numen Lumen: Senior Baccalaureate Reflection, which was held Under the Oaks on May 19. Check out Elon News Network's coverage of the event online at elonnewsnetwork.com.



DESIGN BY MEGAN WALSH



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Seniors Charlotte Sheldrake and Isabelle Coy place their bricks during the “senior brick laying” event. The event allowed seniors to place personalized bricks engraved with their names and graduation year. This year’s event took place from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. on May 6, outside the School of Communications. “I think a big part of it is leaving your mark on a campus that you spent so much time on,” said Rachel Garner ’25, who oversees senior class giving. “It’s something to look for when you come back to campus and visit.”



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Junior Libby Cammisso takes senior Ava Aanstad’s senior photos against the fountain outside the Alamanca Building.



ABBY GRAVELY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Assistant Director of The Center for Race, Ethnicity, & Diversity Education George Dou presents senior stoles at the annual Light the Way celebration May 7 in McKinnon Hall. The event recognizes student achievements among the Asian and Pacific Islander community at Elon. Dou said this year’s event was particularly emotional because it is his fourth year at Elon, so the first group of seniors he has known since their first year are graduating. “I can’t even really put it into words, it’s been so impactful and meaningful,” Dou said.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Cody Watson, the mason for Elon University, sets bricks along the pathway outside the School of Communications during the annual “senior brick laying” event May 6. The event was both a logistical challenge and an opportunity to interact with students for Watson, who has worked on brick-laying events for several years. “We had 240 holes to prep,” Watson said. “I started Monday morning and it took me six hours to get 185 and then came back the next day for two hours to finish the rest.”



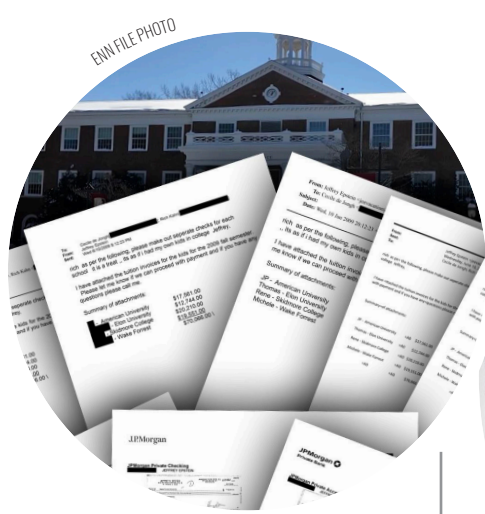
MEGAN WALSH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Seniors clink their mugs with professors Kirstin Ringelberg (back row left) and Evan Gatti (back row right) at the Mugging celebration at Powell House on May 11. The event celebrated art history seniors with mugs and books picked specifically for each senior. To read more about the event, go to page 11.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Graduate Appreciate for the Gender & LGBTQIA Center Kate Campbell has their stole placed on them by student workers at the Lavender Celebration ceremony May 8 in Alumni Gym. The ceremony honored 73 graduating students for their contributions to inclusion on campus. The event has a new name this year, meant to foster a more inclusive space for students, according to director of the GLC Luis Garay. “As we approach our 15 years of having this event, we wanted to have an event that not only fits the mood of what this event is about, but also has it be focused on the fact that it is a stole ceremony.”



FILES REVEAL JEFFREY EPSTEIN PAID TUITION FOR FORMER ELON UNIVERSITY STUDENT

Files released by the Department of Justice revealed that financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein paid tuition for a student attending Elon University in fall 2009. Documents show that Epstein paid \$12,744 toward Fall Term tuition for a student identified as “Thomas,” the son of Jeanne Brennan Wiebracht, the former campaign accountant for then-U.S. Virgin Islands Gov. John de Jongh.



ELON UNIVERSITY, QUEENS UNIVERSITY OF CHARLOTTE PLAN TO MERGE

Elon University President Connie Book announced a proposed merger between Elon and Queens University of Charlotte. If the merger is approved by the end of 2025 and work between both universities goes well through spring, Senior Vice President of Advancement and External Affairs Jim Piatt said Elon would look to begin operating at Queens by Aug. 1, 2026. Piatt is co-chair of the “sprint team” that is planning the merger.

The merger was announced Sept. 16 during

College Coffee and was pitched to the Elon community as a step to expand graduate study opportunities for current and future students.

TOP 10 STORIES THIS YEAR

This year, Elon News Network compiled 10 of our biggest stories of the 2025-26 school year. From a merger announcement to a new school for children with dyslexia to human trafficking advocacy, each story helps illustrate what this school year was like at Elon. Reporting done by Anjolina Fantaroni, Charlotte Pfabe, Lilly Molina, Miles Hayford, Kathan Gandhi, Elissa Leka, Monika Jurevicius, Nia Bedard, Fiona McAllister, Kate Gray, Sarah T. Moore and Trista Panagakos.



ANJOLINA FANTARONI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

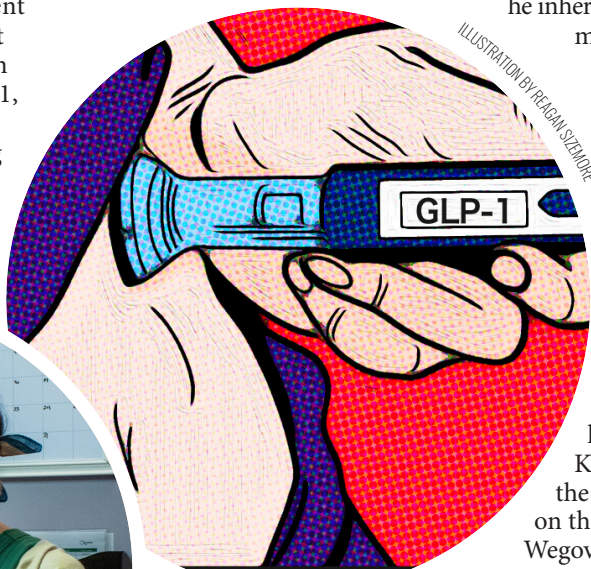


ILLUSTRATION BY REAGAN SZENDRE

MORE THAN A SHOT: WEIGHT LOSS DRUGS ARE RESHAPING STUDENT HEALTH, IDENTITY

Junior Andrew Kochman has \$1,350 sitting in his fridge. Every Tuesday, before he goes to bed, Kochman opens the fridge door and on the side finds his Wegovy shot, a weight

loss medication. He lifts his shirt, injects the medication into his torso, and then discards the shot. He will repeat the same procedure next week.

Kochman is 20 years old and has been on Wegovy for about a year and a half.

CROSSROADS FIGHTS HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN ALAMANCE COUNTY

Christa Hippe was just 12 years old when the sexual abuse began. The abuse was from someone her family trusted, and it went on for years before she knew what human trafficking meant.

“As a young child, I was traumatized,” Hippe said.



MEGAN WALSH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

ELON ANNOUNCES ESTABLISHMENT OF PRIVATE SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN WITH DYSLEXIA

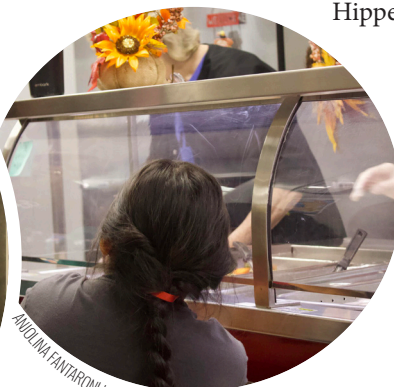
Elon University President Connie Book announced that Elon will welcome the Roberts Academy at Elon University to campus in fall 2026.

The Roberts Academy at Elon University will be a private school for children with dyslexia. It will be the first private school in North Carolina

located on a university campus and dedicated to serving students with dyslexia.

“The reality is there’s no school like this in North Carolina,” Book said in an interview with Elon News Network.

Book announced the plans for Roberts Academy to the Elon community Nov. 6.



ANJOLINA FANTARONI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

‘WE DEFINITELY DON’T WANT ANYBODY TO FEEL HUNGRY.’ ABSS NAVIGATES FREE MEALS, RISING LUNCH DEBT

At 10:32 a.m. at Harvey R. Newlin Elementary School, trays clatter as cafeteria workers rush to prepare the first wave of students for lunch. In this Community Eligibility Provision school, most students eat for free — no forms, no payment and no questions. For many, this may be the most reliable meal they get all day. The Alamance-Burlington School System has 28 CEP schools according to Spencer Brown, the executive director of ABSS Nutrition.



KATHAN GANDHI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

THE ROOKIES: FRESHMAN DUO GROWS UP FAST FOR PHOENIX

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.



PHOTO COURTESY OF AL BRAGG

ELON ALUMS SHARE FIRST-HAND REACTIONS TO WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENTS’ DINNER

Investigators are still working to determine the motive behind the shooting at the White House Correspondents’ Dinner on Saturday evening. There were over 2,000 people at the dinner, including Elon alums.

Seated on the ground level, Annemarie Bonner ‘23 said she first wasn’t sure what she had heard,

but when she realized it was gunshots, the night turned into her worst nightmare.

“I couldn’t even think about journalism at that point honestly, because I was like, ‘What the actual heck has happened?’ And then you’re thinking ‘Oh, my God, we are the news but we’re the newsmakers,’” Bonner said.



KATHAN GANDHI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

ELON HOCKEY EMBRACES NEW ERA OF CAMARADERIE, CONSISTENCY

Elon University men’s club hockey head coach Travis Harris didn’t promise the team championships. He promised them accountability.

“I laid it all out,” Harris said. “I told them what my expectations were, what the plans were for the program. Some kids ended up not coming back. The ones who did helped me build this into what it is today.”

What it is today looks dramatically different from what he inherited at his first team meeting in May.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

FIRE CODE VIOLATIONS STRAIN UNIVERSITY, TOWN RELATIONS

The town of Elon and Elon university are mending relationships and working on more effective communication following a dispute that prompted Elon University to halt all payments to the town. The rollout of a new fire inspection process revealed code violations, which the university had not addressed. One of these violations, written in citation by town of Elon fire marshal Brian Graves, stated that in January 2025, Elon University had “assured” Graves that the carbon monoxide monitors would be installed in Danieley dorms A, B, C and D.

Class of 2026 graduates from a university in transition

Students see expansion through on-campus construction, academics, collaboration with other institutions

Charlotte Pfabe
Elon News Network

Elon's class of 2026 came to campus during a period of construction and renovation. During their four years, Elon announced a new wellness-focused student center, a university merger and a school for children with dyslexia. As Elon seniors cross the commencement stage, they are leaving behind a university that expanded its footprint in the town of Elon and across the state.

Elon advances long-term wellness, sustainability initiatives

Elon created its HealthEU initiative in 2022, and started construction on a building in 2024 that would encompass all pillars of the plan. The Slattery Center will sit on Innovation Quad, between Innovation Hall and Richard W. Sankey Hall. The Slattery Center, also known as the HealthEU building, was expected to open in spring 2026, but summer rain delays pushed back the opening date. Now, the Slattery Center is set to open in fall 2026.

The 135,000 square foot building is a part of Elon's 2030 Boldly Elon strategic plan. One of these goals was to renovate Koury Athletic Center and create a hub in the heart of campus dedicated to wellness. Director of HealthEU Anu Räisänen said the Slattery Center will do just that.

"The opening of the Slattery Center will be a huge benchmark for establishing us as one of the national leaders, because it is really a unique building in the sense that it's not going to be just a traditional rec center," Räisänen said.

Räisänen said over the next four years, the HealthEU initiative will focus on expanding research.

"We're focusing on our well-being in higher education and hoping to bring more students onto that," Räisänen said.

The final plans for the Koury Athletic Center are still being determined, Räisänen said. Some equipment from the gym will be moved over to the new fitness center, but the plan is to keep the Koury gym operational until the Slattery Center officially opens its doors.

Part of the parking lot near the future Slattery Center was removed for the construction, but a new parking lot was built near the Francis Center for first-year students only. Elon first-year student parking was previously included alongside other class parking, but during the 2026 Winter Term, first-year students were moved to the new lot.

Elon's strategic plan also sets a goal beyond 2030 — by 2037, campus would be carbon neutral, meaning that the amount of carbon dioxide emissions and carbon dioxide removed from the atmosphere would be equal. It states that the campus will engage in sustainable practices, such as reducing energy consumption by 20%, to achieve this goal.

With sustainability in mind, Elon launched the EcoVillage LLC in fall 2024. The residential neighborhood includes six tiny homes at Loy Farm, housing 12 students. The homes are around 600 square feet each.

Nursing enrollment doubles in four years

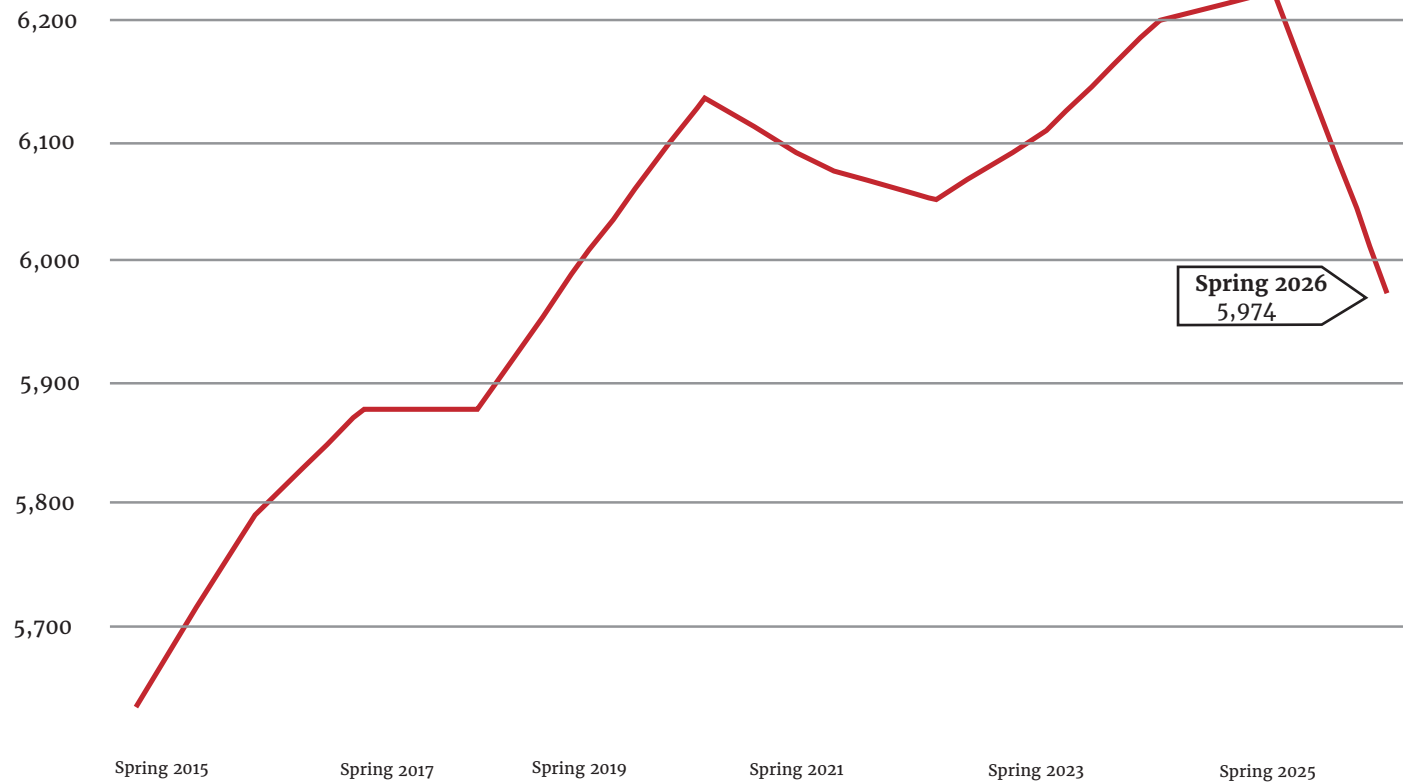
Elon launched its nursing program in fall 2021, but when the class of 2026 got to campus, the Francis Center was under renovation. The building, which used to be a Smithfield Ham factory outlet, had been used for classes since 2012, but was not fully renovated until phased construction began in 2020.

Unlike when Elon seniors got to campus their freshman year, Elon now has an accredited nursing program. The National League for Nursing Commission for Nursing Education Accreditation granted the school accreditation in spring 2025, a few months before the first class of nursing majors graduated.

Following the accreditation, nursing department chair and program director Dr. Cathy Quay said attention would be turned to

Undergraduate enrollment at Elon from 2015-2026

Total number of undergraduate student enrolled at Elon University.



Data from Elon University Office of the Registrar.

growing the program.

"We're really starting to talk about longer term," Quay said in a previous interview with Elon News Network. "What's our vision in terms of ensuring that our curriculum is current and staying up to date with what we're seeing in healthcare?"

Enrollment for the School of Health Sciences has doubled since seniors got to campus. According to Elon's Office of the Registrar, in fall 2022, the School of Health Sciences enrolled 107 nursing majors. This spring, 231 nursing majors are enrolled.

New academic programs launch amid enrollment changes

Elon added to its academic offerings. In fall 2025, Elon launched two new majors: neuroscience and digital content management.

According to the spring 2026 registrar's report, 55 students are majoring in neuroscience and 36 are majoring in digital content management. In a previous interview with Elon News Network, Vic Costello, the program director of digital content management, said they are expected to reach 50 majors by the end of this academic year.

However, Elon's overall enrollment is down compared to four years ago. In fall 2022, the Elon's Office of the Registrar reported 6,337 total undergraduate students. As of the spring 2026 registrar's report, 5,974 undergraduate students are enrolled at Elon, 363 fewer students compared to fall 2022. This is the first time since spring 2018 that undergraduate enrollment has dipped below 6,000.

Elon's class of 2029 enrollment saw an 11.6% decrease compared to the previous year. In fall 2025, there were a total of 1,517 freshmen for the 2025-26 academic year.

Some experts point to the demographic cliff as the cause for enrollment drops. The Great Recession in 2007 triggered what is known as the demographic cliff. Fewer babies were born after 2007, meaning fewer 18-year-olds are attending college.

Elon's Office of Admissions was expecting this drop in enrollment, according to a previous statement from Vice President for Enrollment Greg Zaiser.

"We've been aware of, talking about and strategizing around demographic shifts and the cliff for more years," Zaiser wrote in an email to Elon News Network. "In 2017, we commissioned a markets analysis study to identify domestic locations in which we should start building a greater presence, awareness and overall strategy."

Elon expands in Charlotte, opens a new school on campus

Elon seniors are graduating just before the potential merger between Elon University and Queens University of Charlotte. The two universities submitted their request for accreditation approval in March and are expecting a response from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges in June.



I THINK IT'S A REALLY GOOD MOVE FOR BOTH INSTITUTIONS.

JEFF STEIN
CHIEF INTEGRATION OFFICER AT ELON

If the two universities receive joint accreditation from the commission, integration will begin. Beginning July 1, some departments, including admissions, facilities, human resources and career services, at both institutions will officially merge. Queens employees in those departments will

officially become Elon employees on July 1, which means they will officially be added to Elon's payroll, and healthcare and retirement benefits.

Jeff Stein, chief integration officer at Elon, said the merger will benefit students, faculty and staff at Elon and Queens.

"I think it's a really good move for both institutions," Stein said in a previous interview with Elon News Network.

After approval from the SACSCOC, the universities will look to fully complete the merger through approval from the U.S. Department of Education, which could come in late 2027 or early 2028.

Elon already has a presence in Charlotte, North Carolina with Elon Law's Flex program. The program was approved by the American Bar Association and the SACSCOC in February 2024, and welcomed its first cohort in fall 2024. Now, the university looks to establish a full-time law program in Charlotte, according to an email Elon University President Connie Book shared with students Jan. 13, 2026.

Elon Charlotte, a Study USA program, launched in September 2023.

As Elon looks to further expand opportunities in Charlotte, it's also planning to open a new school on campus, but not for college students.

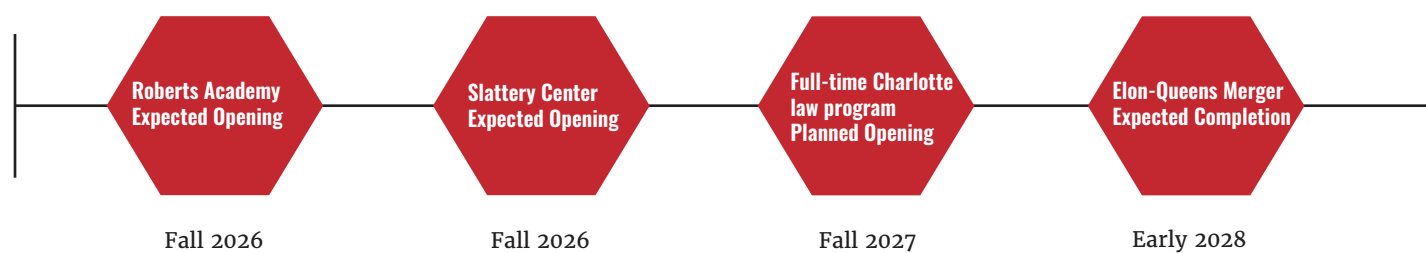
Elon moved students living in the International House Living-Learning Community at Trollinger House after the fall semester to make temporary space for The Roberts Academy at Elon University, a private school for children with dyslexia. It will be the first private school in North Carolina located on a university campus and dedicated to serving students with dyslexia.

Book announced the academy in November 2025. It is set to open in fall 2026.

A new 30,000 square foot permanent building for the academy on East Haggard Avenue is planned for fall 2028.

Miles Hayford and Mia Torres contributed to the reporting of this story.

Elon University 2026-2028 expansion roadmap



GRAPHIC BY MILES HAYFORD

Ten Elon professors prepare to retire from Elon Univ



Sharon LaRocco accompanies a student on piano in her office as they prepare for the juries, a formal performance examination. ELISSA LEKA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

SHARON LAROCO

University accompanist and instructor in music Sharon LaRocco said she has been building her love of music since she was three-years-old, playing songs by ear, and that joy she found has carried her through 37 years in Elon's music department.

LaRocco witnessed the Fighting Christian mascot graduate with the class of 2000, giving way to the current Phoenix mascot.

After nearly four decades, LaRocco said she is proud of how much the music department accomplishes despite being one of the smaller programs at Elon.

"What is amazing is how much the music department puts out, how much they service this university, the community," LaRocco said. "Amazing, amazing."

As she looks ahead to a future as a retiree, LaRocco said she is excited to not have to put on an alarm and to have a choice in what she wants to do and when she wants to do it. Whether that's going on small trips with her family, reading historical fiction or books by Native American authors, or even buying Native jewelry, she won't be constrained by a school schedule.

LaRocco is also ready to put even more

of her time into advocacy. She serves as a leader for her local autism chapter. To her, though, advocacy doesn't just happen in these meetings; it happens daily. Her son is non-verbal and has high needs autism, requiring LaRocco and her family to speak for him constantly. When an infection followed a recent surgery, doctors recommended removing a device critical to managing his seizures, without considering what that would mean for his quality of life.

As strong as she is for her family, she said, leaving Elon is harder to face. LaRocco said she is scared to retire, even if she knows it's time.

LaRocco said she has built the kind of relationships at Elon where she can talk to a student or colleague about the "nerdy" side of music and be understood and met with the same enthusiasm. Though she is going to miss her students especially, LaRocco said it is time for her to "drift" into the next chapter of her life.

"I'm like, 'Oh, you're not going to fit in,'" LaRocco said while crying. "So, it's going to take a while for me to do that, but I've got a lot of fun things I want to do."

BETH MCCAIN

When the dean of Elon's Love School of Business called Beth McCain during winter term in 2025, the assistant teaching professor of accounting had already decided she was going to retire in the spring of that year. But the dean had asked if she would be willing to stay one more semester to be a part of the inaugural faculty in residence in the Singapore program that was recently started.

McCain said yes.

Before retiring in December, McCain taught two courses in Singapore, a principles of finance course and a course on fraud and financial crimes.

After a decade as an accounting professor, McCain said study abroad trips, especially winter term trips, were part of some of her most memorable moments at the university.

"I really like getting to know the students really well by doing those study abroad programs because you're together 24/7," McCain said.

She said she hopes her students love learning as much as she does.

The transition from professor to retiree wasn't without its challenges. Though

McCain said she looked forward to retirement, the first month proved to be an adjustment.

"You kind of get used to coming on campus and seeing the students and your colleagues," McCain said. "I actually had a really hard time the first month, but now, it's great. I have the time to do whatever I want whenever I want to do it."

Her days now include volunteering at an animal shelter, hiking, and sailing.

The retired professor has also returned as a student, taking French classes with juniors and seniors. She said she plans on moving to France with her husband in the future, partly to be closer to her daughter, who lives in England, and also to enjoy and immerse herself in the culture.

McCain's husband has been retired for three years and has spent time traveling to see their children, who both live far away, but was more constrained while working as a professor. Though the overall decision was difficult, the result was rewarding, and she said her time at Elon was successful.

"I had such a great ten years here, and I felt like I was going out on a high point," McCain said.

schedule.

Dunn has continued teaching three classes for an hour and a half at the Greensboro chapter of the Unity Church.

"I can just continue to teach and continue to mediate in court, but be more relaxed about it," Dunn said.

As a part of her church's spiritual retreat, Dunn recently went on a trip to Bali. She said it was an opportunity for people internationally to unite and learn about a culture and religion. Her favorite moment was during an island-wide period of reflection.

Despite enjoying her time in Bali, she does not plan on making any more large

LINDA DUNN

Linda Dunn had not initially planned on retiring, but after months of trying to find a department for her class as a part of the minor in peace and conflict studies, Elon University could not take her on as a part-time professor for the 2025-2026 academic year. On Aug. 1, before the year started, Dunn entered retirement after 27 years of teaching at Elon.

In retirement, Dunn said she can still get the benefits of attending cultural events for free at Elon, which she said has been fun to attend, especially with her flexible

CHARITY JOHANSSON

Charity Johansson, a retired professor of physical therapy, wakes up happy in her home in the woods, 45 minutes from Elon.

"I wake up every morning thinking what a good life I have," Johansson said.

After taking on a leadership role on top of teaching at Elon, Johansson made the decision to step down and retire in December of 2025 after fall semester. She said that her own mental and physical health, as well as time with family, were major factors in her retirement. The role demanded a lot of attention from her, and though she had the support of colleagues, she said it was time for her to retire.

The experience taught her more about herself.

"I grew a lot because I thought, if I'm going to do this, I'm going to do it to the best of my ability," Johansson said. "And I grew professionally, but I also grew personally, and that was really valuable to take with me when I retired."

Johansson didn't want to "fall off a cliff" when she retired, so before leaving, she wrote down everything she planned on doing, however after creating that list she decided to write "experiment!" diagonally

across the page. She said her intention was to allow herself the space to figure out what she enjoyed doing without the pressure of needing to do it well.

From doing stonework around her garden to writing both a textbook and a work of fiction, Johansson said she is keeping herself busy.

"Writing is a challenge, but it's one that I love," Johansson said. "Fiction is one of the best purveyors of truth, and I love that about it."

Johansson said the time she has spent at Elon has fostered the kinds of relationships where her students and colleagues have sent her encouraging messages as she moves on to retirement. One example of these colleagues is Connie Book, who Johansson had worked alongside before Book became Elon's president.

Ultimately, Johansson said not much has changed about her in retirement other than her confidence, her health, and her positive mindset.

"I'm always going to be industrious, I'm always going to be curious, I'm always going to be doing things, I'm always going to be busy," Johansson said.



Robert Moorman stands outside the Inman Admissions Welcome Center, where he posed by the Elon sign, a staple in Instagram photos. After 15 years at the school, he is retiring alongside the graduating class of 2026. ELISSA LEKA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

ROBERT MOORMAN

Joining students in their journey to graduation, and learning the Instagram-worthiness of the Elon sign outside of the Inman Admissions Welcome Center, is Robert Moorman, who is retiring after a 15-year-long career at Elon University.

"This year, I'm going to be a graduating senior, kind of going through the same thing that they are," Moorman said.

At Elon, Moorman worked in the Love School of Business as the Frank S. Holt, Jr. professor of business leadership and of organizational behavior.

"I really like teaching in the business school because it's this nice combination of talking to people about philosophies and theories and approaches, but also with a very practical bend to it all," Moorman said.

Moorman specializes in organizational behavior, which he said aims to recognize how a person's well-being relates to an organization's well-being.

Earlier this semester, Moorman and his students were juggling, literally.

"I'm not a good juggler, but I use it to try to illustrate the difference between people who can perform because they have the

abilities to do it, and people who perform because they have the motivation to do it," Moorman said.

He juggled for the class and asked if any students would try it. When no one said yes, he brought out a \$20 bill, and the students tried but still couldn't juggle. He said he hopes students learned something valuable about management from it: asking an employee to do something because of an incentive doesn't make that person work better, and doing so is ultimately unhelpful to their well-being.

Beyond management skills, Moorman said he hopes students have taken away the importance of joy.

"It's important to find joy, and I think the way to do it is not to say I'm going to look really hard to find the thing I can be joyful within, but instead, I'm going to work really hard to find joy in what I'm doing," Moorman said.

Going into retirement, Moorman said he is frequently asked if he will be bored.

"I'm not worried about being bored," Moorman said. "I kind of look forward to being bored. Let's see what happens there."

trips in the near future as she wants to be mindful of her spending.

As a professor, Dunn said she taught students conflict management that steps away from "competing" with your audience. Ironically, she said that while teaching students not to compete, she found herself competing with them about the information in their textbook. So, she said she took on a new approach.

"I had them read chapters and do the presentation, and so I wasn't having to compete with them," Dunn said.

Dunn said learning not to compete is something important to her, and something she believes should be important to others.

"It teaches you that you have to be better than somebody else, or that you have to be the best to get what you want, and so you're constantly comparing yourself to other people," Dunn said. "Why? You just have to be the best that you can be, and then you're contributing to the beauty of the world."

If she had the opportunity to teach at Elon again, she said she would.

"I love teaching," Dunn said. "I love interacting with students, but it's nice to have freedom and the flexibility when you don't have a given schedule."

iversity, step into a new phase of life | STORIES AND PHOTOS BY: ELISSA LEKA



Rosemary Haskell sits in her office where she has her students work prepped for grading May 16.

ELISSA LEKA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

ROSEMARY HASKELL

While attending the University of Durham in the 1970's in England, Rosemary Haskell saw a notice pinned on a wall that said there was an opportunity for university students to work as teaching assistants while obtaining a master's degree in Massachusetts. On a "whim," Haskell followed that notice to the United States, where she has lived ever since. "Once you've got an M.A. in English, the only cure is a PhD in English," Haskell said.

Haskell came to North Carolina when she was working on her doctorate at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. She said she chose Elon because there were not many available jobs for someone with her education, and moving was not an option for her family. She has worked as a professor of English for 41 years.

During her time at Elon, Haskell said some of the best moments in her classroom were when students began understanding

difficult concepts.

More than comprehending concepts, Haskell said, watching students find interest in books and learning is most rewarding.

"They think it's difficult or boring, and then something happens, and it's not always clear what," Haskell said, "but they seem to collectively or perhaps gradually decide, yep, this is worth doing. This is worth reading."

While she joked that retirement will mean longer conversations with her cat, Haskell said she is looking forward to the change. She plans on reading, but also working in the local community by canvassing more for the upcoming elections.

Haskell said she has mixed feelings about retiring from Elon, but knows it is her time.

"The students really feed my energy, and I hope I feed theirs as well," Haskell said. "I'm really going to miss them."

LINDA NIEDZIELA

Linda Niedziela said she is the kind of person who likes variety in her day. In the morning, she's writing letters as department chair of biology, in the afternoon, she is working through data, and between that, she is teaching her students.

"I like to not do the same thing over and over again," Niedziela said.

And for the last 25 years, she has done that.

Niedziela said she made sure she was retiring from Elon at the same time as her final research mentees. The professor works closely with student researchers, guiding them through the dense literature, and even helping them out in the labs. She wanted to make sure that she had no loose threads when she left.

Being a department chair, Niedziela said she had to build up a versatile skill set that could span her leadership and teaching roles simultaneously.

"I'm organized, I'm a collaborator, I like building people up," Niedziela said.

As she looks ahead, Niedziela said that

she will miss her students and especially her colleagues with whom she has worked her entire career at Elon, but there are a number of things she is looking forward to doing.

"I don't have to go camping in the middle of the summer when it's so hot, I can go whenever I want to," Niedziela said.

Along with her husband Carl Niedziela, who also works at Elon, she does woodwork and trains her dogs to compete in sports. While her elderly show dog is reaching the end of his own career, Niedziela said she is getting her younger one ready for competition.

"He's just getting to an age where he can chill out enough to go through competition," Niedziela said.

Niedziela said as she leaves, she hopes her students have found the love of science she has experienced throughout her career.

"There are so many opportunities, even if they might not want to be in the research lab," Niedziela said. "The skills that they learn along the way can help them do anything."

ANTHONY HATCHER

Chair of the journalism department Anthony Hatcher said there was no "flash of lightning" that revealed it was time for him to retire after 24 years working at the school. Instead, he said it was the realization that time was moving, and he wanted to make sure that his current energy wasn't lost when spending time with his almost 2-year-old granddaughter.

"I am looking forward to it despite the fact that I will miss my students and my friends terribly," Hatcher said.

Two years ago, Hatcher said he never would've imagined he would be retiring this year. He said he is used to waving his colleagues down in the hallways for a quick chat or an impromptu lunch. Hatcher joked that when traveling abroad, he was used to having a trail of thirty or so students behind him.

That same accessibility was found in his office.

Throughout his teaching career, Hatcher said his door has always been open to all of his students because being available to all voices was important to him.

This openness extended to students of all political views. Hatcher said the best part of his day was being in a classroom filled with students.

Many of Hatcher's classes centered on open discussion of course material, and while most students shared similar

perspectives, he said more conservative students often held back. The biggest compliment he received, he said, was when a student with opposing views felt comfortable enough to come to his office and share them.

"My response is always, thank you for confiding in me, and let's talk about this and talk about ways you could contribute because I don't want you to feel intimidated," Hatcher said.

His wife often joked about how open he was to differing opinions. Passing protests, rallies, or religious events, she would want to keep moving, but Hatcher said he was always curious to hear what people had to say and would stop to engage.

This was not something he had always done, though. As a person, his experiences abroad, as a journalist, and as a teacher have opened him to the diverse opinions of others. From a teaching perspective, he has learned to adapt to different personalities, world views, and learning styles.

As he makes his way into retirement, Hatcher said he is excited about the opportunities ahead, whether that is freelance writing for news outlets, spur-of-the-moment trips to New York with his wife, or simply being there for his granddaughter.

"The idea of being spontaneous really excites me," Hatcher said.

JOAN BARNATT

For the last two years, Joan Barnatt, an associate professor of education, has been easing into retirement gradually, giving up responsibilities one at a time rather than stepping away all at once. She will officially retire at the end of the summer semester, during which she is teaching two courses.

"I'm ready to do this," Barnatt said. "We make a choice when we retire, and I'm looking forward to being able to do more of the things that compete for time with my job and not feel that push and pull on it."

Barnatt said there was no singular deciding factor that made her want to retire.

"It's about feeling more frustration around the bits and pieces that you don't enjoy all the time about your job and recognizing that there can be other things that fill those spaces," Barnatt said.

Barnatt said that being an educator who teaches future educators is rewarding. For years, Barnatt said she has followed students during the spring semester as graduation approaches, observing and documenting what happens as they work.

"You see this huge leap forward in

their confidence, in their ability, in their anticipation to go into their own classrooms," Barnatt said.

Barnatt said she is not afraid of retirement. She said she plans on maintaining contact with the people she loves at Elon and hopes that her students learn to do the same thing.

"All of us here at Elon, including myself, stay with them as they go forward, and you become part of a network, you become part of a community," Barnatt said. "And that doesn't go away when you graduate."

Going into her own version of graduation, Barnatt said she is excited for her future freedom.

Barnatt has a coastal home in Maine, a garden in need of tending, and time she wants to spend with family, but she said teaching will always remain a part of her.

"I think you go into the profession as a teacher yourself, and then you may go on to other things, but that see that brought you to the profession is still there," Barnatt said. "Constantly being able to see what's going on and what the future looks like through children is very exciting."

ELIZABETH BAILEY

Retirement in May is not the scariest matter assistant teaching professor of exercise science Elizabeth Bailey said she has to face. In fact, it is her office that scares her the most.

The room is filled with everything from paperwork and student assignments to her bicycle that she said she can't get on without the intention of riding.

"How the heck?" Bailey said. "It's going to take me another month to move out of this office."

Bailey said she has a lot on her plate, but her priority is getting her students' work graded and wrapping up her research responsibilities before the school year ends.

"I'm looking forward to not having to work at night and not making or breaking people's life by their grade," Bailey said.

During her 22 years at Elon, Bailey started new classes and taught study abroad courses, and so her work has never stayed stagnant.

"There's lots of opportunity to explore things that you're interested in, to teach new things, to start new classes," Bailey said.

The professor said she knew it was time for her to retire when all of her college friends had already taken that step. Bailey said she spends a lot of time with them, and it's often her demanding work schedule that forces activities and plans to be put on hold. While she will miss teaching, she is excited to spend more of her time with friends and family.

Bailey said she also plans on spending her free time reading, painting, playing tennis, and learning Italian.

"I'll miss the people that I work with, and the students," Bailey said. "I always learn from them, and so I will miss that. I will have to find a way to fill that void."



ELISSA LEKA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

As the academic year wraps up, Linda Niedziela compiles student grade data ahead of the biology department's end-of-year review, where faculty reflect on what's working and what can be improved for Elon students.

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Elon nursing seniors prepare for national exam



Senior nursing student Julia Ricker prepares for the NCLEX exam in one of the Belk Library study rooms May 13.

EMMA PERMAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Stress, preparation, build as seniors approach NCLEX to become registered nurses

Emma Perman
Elon News Network

As graduation approaches for seniors in the nursing program at Elon University, many students say their final hurdle before officially becoming a registered nurse is actually after they walk across the stage.

The National Council Licensure Examination, better known as the NCLEX, is the standardized national exam required for nursing graduates to become licensed registered nurses in the United States.

"When a student graduates from a nursing program, they graduate with a BSN, a bachelor's degree in nursing," Cathy Quay, program director and associate professor of nursing, said.

"They still have to pass the exam in order to practice. So, just graduating from a nursing program does not allow you to practice," Quay said.

According to the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, Elon University's Bachelor of Science in nursing program posted a 95% pass rate for first-time test takers from Dec. 2025 graduates during the Jan. through March 2026 testing period.

Quay said Elon's Accelerated Bachelor of Science in nursing program, designed for students who already earned a non-nursing bachelor's degree and completed nursing coursework in 16 months, had 19 graduates pass out of 20.

The national passing rate for BSN students is currently 69.90%, according to the NCSBN.

Freshman nursing student Ava Gaudet said that before arriving at Elon, much of what she saw online about the NCLEX focused on fear and failure.

"I saw a lot of students say how difficult it was or sharing stories about failing," Gaudet said.

However, Gaudet said that after joining Elon's nursing program, her perspective

changed after seeing the preparation resources and support systems available to students.

For senior nursing major Julia Ricker, the reality of taking the exam is quickly approaching.

Both students said social media has played a complicated role in their NCLEX preparation. While online discussions can increase anxiety, they also provide reassurance that many nursing students share similar fears.

"I think seeing on social media that so many people come out of the NCLEX and just sit in their car and are like, 'I have no idea what I just read,' is kind of reassuring and nerve-racking at the same time," Ricker said.

Ricker, who has already accepted a job as a labor and delivery nurse in Pittsburgh, said preparing for the NCLEX has become a major part of her daily routine. Nursing students at Elon use ATI, an online learning and testing platform provided through the program, but many students also purchase outside preparation programs to supplement their studying, according to Ricker.

"I personally am doing Archer because I've been told that it's closest to what the NCLEX will look like," Ricker said. "Some people recommend UWorld because they say it's harder than the NCLEX, so the NCLEX can feel easier."

Quay said students begin seriously preparing for the NCLEX during their junior year once they enter clinical coursework.

"That's when they start their clinical coursework and they start to use some of the software that we have available in the program that is providing them with a lot of practice," Quay said.

Students complete practice questions, virtual simulations and case studies throughout the program to prepare for both clinical practice and the licensing exam.

"They are receiving a holistic education and preparation for practicing as a nurse, which in turn prepares you to take that exam," Quay said.

The NCLEX is a computerized adaptive

test, meaning the exam adjusts difficulty based on how students answer questions. The test can end anywhere between 85 and 150 questions, depending on whether the system determines a student has passed or failed. Nursing students typically take the test following graduation, but it can be scheduled year-round.

Senior nursing student Jillian Freglette said the exam focuses heavily on patient safety rather than simple memorization.

"It's not really a test on knowledge," Freglette said. "It's more so a test on critical thinking and if you're able to apply knowledge to answer a question and more about safety."

Ricker said faculty members structure exams throughout students' coursework to mirror the style and format of NCLEX questions. Students also take predictor exams throughout the program that estimate their probability of passing the NCLEX and identify areas where improvement is needed, according to Quay.

Students like Ricker can secure nursing jobs before taking the NCLEX, but they cannot officially begin working until they

pass the exam and receive their RN license number. If a student fails the exam, they must wait before retaking it.

"It's not common for us to have students who fail," Quay said.

Still, Ricker said balancing NCLEX preparation with senior year responsibilities, clinical work and graduation has been difficult. She said the pressure surrounding the exam can create feelings of imposter syndrome.

"You just have to keep reminding yourself why you're doing this," Ricker said. "There will be moments where you think, 'This is so hard. I don't know if I can do this.' But I made it this far for a reason. I'm here because I deserve to be here."

Despite the pressure, Ricker said she continues to remind herself why she chose nursing in the first place.

"There have been so many moments in clinical experiences where I've had a moment where I'm just like, 'Wow, this is what I want to do with the rest of my life,'" Ricker said. "Passing and knowing that I can do this for the rest of my life is something I'm very much looking forward to."



Senior nursing student Julia Ricker reviews her Archer practice test results to identify areas of improvement May 13.

EMMA PERMAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

SGA leaders reflect as new executive team takes over

Graduating seniors look back on leadership, initiatives and legacy left behind

Mia Torres
Elon News Network

As the final business meeting of the Student Government Association this year came to a close, members reflected on a year of legislation, leadership transitions and the future of student organizations on campus.

The meeting marked the fourth session led by the newly sworn-in executive board, as the organization continues its transition into a new term of leadership.

For former SGA executive president Anya Bratic, stepping away from SGA has been an emotional transition after four years of involvement.

Bratic said the final meeting with the outgoing executive board on April 2 marked the end of a chapter that shaped nearly her entire college experience.

"I've never known an Elon without SGA," Bratic said. "It's made me the person I am and the leader I am."

Bratic, a senior studying international and global studies and public policy, said one of her most meaningful accomplishments was launching "Any's Top Five," a social media series aimed at connecting students with overlooked campus resources and opportunities.

"Elon is a very resource-rich campus," Bratic said. "Students often think we don't have the things that they need, but the problem is that they just lack awareness that the resources exist."

The series reached nearly 100,000 views over the course of the year, featuring everything from campus events to practical tutorials like how to print double-sided documents.

Bratic also highlighted SGA's civic engagement town hall, "Small Changes, Big Impact," which connected students with local civic leaders and community organizations while encouraging engagement beyond campus.



I'VE NEVER KNOWN AN ELON WITHOUT SGA. IT'S MADE ME THE PERSON I AM AND THE LEADER I AM.

ANYA BRATIC
FORMER SGA EXECUTIVE PRESIDENT

At the start of her term, Bratic said her goal was to reach students who were not heavily involved in campus life.

"We wanted to tap the untapped student," Bratic said. "Students that we know have potential, but just haven't been tapped for an opportunity yet."

She said senators played a key role in helping identify students for university committees based on their interests, expanding access to leadership opportunities for newer students.

Throughout the year, SGA passed several pieces of legislation, including a proposal from two first-year senators establishing a suggestion box in Moseley Center for students to submit feedback directly to SGA. Another initiative designated February as campus safety awareness month.

One of the most significant changes this year came with the implementation of a new quarter-by-quarter funding model for student organizations.

Former vice president of finance Ian

Becker said the new system replaced the previous first-come, first-served process and required extensive outreach to student organizations across campus.

"It was a big change," Becker said. "I went to as many in-person meetings as possible."

He said much of his work focused on helping organizations understand the new system and improving access to funding.

"I think that reach and communication of meeting everybody was very nice," Becker said.

As the new executive board begins its term, incoming leaders said mentorship from the outgoing team has been essential to a smooth transition.

"She's taught me a lot of things," newly elected SGA president Michael Swartz said of Bratic. "Talking about parts of the role that aren't documented in writing has been the biggest help."

Swartz said observing Bratic's leadership over the past several years shaped his own approach to the role.

"Seeing her grow as a leader and really put that into action was inspiring," Swartz said.

Next year, Swartz plans to continue resource-focused outreach through an updated "Top Five" series while also launching a new initiative highlighting campus employees, including custodians and dining hall staff.

"I want people to walk by someone cleaning a floor in a building and say, 'I know where they're from,'" Swartz said. "Trying to highlight those community members and make campus feel more connected as a whole."

Incoming Vice President of Finance Cayce Becker said outgoing executive members have remained available throughout the transition, especially as the organization continues adjusting to the new funding system.

"They've been incredibly helpful," Becker

said. "They're always willing to answer any question."

Becker said the new executive board plans to continue refining the quarter funding model while working closely with student organizations to address challenges from its first year of implementation.

"We want to work with students to make sure we're addressing all of those issues," Becker said.

Becker said, for graduating seniors, leaving SGA marks both an ending and the continuation of work they hope will carry forward beyond Elon.

"It's bittersweet," Becker said. "You have a whole community here that you've built over the past four years."

Becker said his time in SGA helped him grow both personally and professionally by giving him direct experience working with university leaders and student organizations.

"I think being on SGA opened up those doors to get those communications, those rooms, those meetings where you can definitely make a change and have your voice heard," Becker said.

After graduation, Becker plans to pursue a career in supply chain and operations management.

Bratic said SGA played a defining role in her confidence and development as a leader during her time at Elon.

"I was really quiet my first semester," Bratic said. "SGA gave me a platform."

As she prepares to graduate, Bratic said she is proud of what the organization has accomplished and confident in its future leadership.

Following graduation, Bratic will move to Vietnam after receiving a Fulbright award, where she will spend a year teaching English to high school or college students.

"It's sad because I don't get to continue moving on with this thing that's been a part of my life for so long," Bratic said. "But I know that it's in really good hands."



Elon Student Government Association Vice President of Finance Ian Brecker and Vice President of Communications Kennedy Steiner stand at their last SGA meeting during their time at Elon on April 2.

MIA TORRES | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

From landscaping to utilities, university readies campus for commencement activities

Facilities, landscaping, utilities teams work to ensure campus is ready for ceremonies

Mia Torres
Elon News Network

As commencement approaches at Elon University, behind the scenes, the landscaping, grounds, facilities and utilities teams are already deep into preparations to ensure the university looks its best for graduating students and their families.

For Audrey Rose, a gardener, commencement season is both familiar and demanding. While campus upkeep is a year-round responsibility, she said the work intensifies in the weeks leading up to graduation, particularly after May 8.

"It really starts about a month out for us or more," Rose said. "But today is kind of the big push."

Her day-to-day responsibilities don't stop for commencement, but the focus shifts toward finishing details such as cleaning up flower beds, pruning, removing weeds and making sure every corner of campus is both safe and visually polished.

"All the grounds need to be looking as perfect as possible," Rose said. "We're just trying to work on the fine details."

That attention to detail becomes even more important as staffing challenges add pressure to the workload. Rose noted that the department is currently operating short-staffed, which has made the preparation period more demanding.

"It makes it a little bit more challenging," Rose said. "We're just doing the best we can to keep everything looking as good as possible and keeping things watered."

Despite the added pressure, Rose said the annual flower beds remain a personal highlight of her work. The rotating



MIA TORRES | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Facilities management vehicles drive around campus May 8 to make sure every corner of the campus looks clean.

plant displays which are replanted and redesigned each year are something she enjoys maintaining no matter where they appear across campus.

"I would have to say the annual beds," Rose said. "I've just always enjoyed them."

For assistant gardener Cevion Marsh-Sheridan, commencement preparation is task-focused. He said the work picks up in the final week before events, with an emphasis on preparing trees and outdoor spaces where ceremonies and gatherings take place.

While his role centers on specific areas of maintenance, he pointed to those ceremonial spaces as requiring the most attention as graduation approaches.

Beyond landscaping, utility operations teams also play a major role in preparing campus facilities for commencement events. Brian Chandler, assistant director of utility operations, said his department focuses on ensuring all event spaces

are fully functional and ready for large crowds.

"My role in commencement is to ensure my departments are checking certain areas and making sure all things are functional at different locations for all the events," Chandler said.

Chandler said preparations typically begin several weeks before graduation with teams conducting walkthroughs of event spaces across campus.

According to Chandler, buildings that host commencement-related events require the most attention, including the Schar Center and Moseley Center. His department alone includes 28 staff members across utilities, electrical, heating and air operations, all involved in commencement preparation alongside carpentry, moving and setup crews.

While the week leading up to graduation can be hectic, Chandler said the process has become highly organized

over time.

"I wouldn't say there are any challenges, because we've done it so long," Chandler said. "Everybody knows their role and what they're supposed to do."

Facilities management departments coordinate through meetings held throughout the semester and more frequently as commencement approaches. Chandler said much of the work focuses not only on setup, such as arranging chairs and preparing event spaces, but also resetting campus back to normal operations after ceremonies conclude.

Behind the broader coordination of campus readiness, Scott Stevens, director of landscaping and transportation, said commencement preparation is a long-term process that begins months in advance. In a statement to Elon News Network, he said that multiple facilities management departments coordinate to prepare campus spaces for events, with increased attention as May approaches.

"As we get to May, the plan goes into action," Stevens wrote. "Each FM department will double-check areas, touching up any details missed. When the event is complete, FM will either reset the area for the next event or break down the area for normal business activities."

For the grounds crew, the work is also personal. Rose said one of the most meaningful parts of commencement season is the energy that comes with students preparing to graduate and move on to what comes next.

As students prepare to leave campus, the landscaping team continues shaping the environment they will remember in photographs, ceremonies and final walks across campus lawns. For Rose, that cycle is one of the most meaningful parts of the job.

"You kind of see them grow up," she said of students. "And then they're gone, and a whole new batch comes in."

Elon Art History program celebrates seniors with personalized gifts in mugging celebration

Seniors receive mugs, books to commemorate education

Megan Walsh
Elon News Network

The Elon University Art History program celebrated its seniors with mugs and books picked specifically for each senior at the end-of-year Mugging celebration May 11.

The celebration brought art history majors and minors together, as well as the museum studies minors, to celebrate the graduating seniors at Powell House, the program's home.

Each student received this year's purple mug printed with the hashtag "#LMTAH" or "Learn More Take Art History". Seniors also received specially selected books by the program's professors, tailored to their interests or future plans.

Coordinator of the Art History program Evan Gatti said the tradition of specially designed mugs began about a decade ago, and a few years in, the program began asking senior students for their input on the design of the mugs.

Gatti said the celebration was not always referred to as the Mugging, but after she called it that one year, the name has stuck. She said the mugs have become iconic to the students, with alumni asking to be mailed the newest mugs and posting pictures with them online.

"One of our alumni went to Paris and was meeting with whatever the school is that we work with in Paris, and they had come and done a session here, and I had given them mugs," Gatti said. "She walks into this office in Paris, and there's an art history at Elon mug.

So that's fun. It's fun to see them in the wild."

Seniors like Téa Jones and Lizzie Ostling both said the Mugging celebration is part of the reason they joined the Art History program.

Jones said she had a friend as a freshman who she watched receive their senior mug, which encouraged her to join the program.



IT'S THE CUTEST TRADITION EVER. I LOVE TELLING EVERYONE ABOUT IT.

TÉA JONES
ELON SENIOR

"It feels very full circle. I remember watching her, and getting her book, and getting to see her mug. And I was like, that's going to be so far away from me," Jones said. "And now I'm here, and it feels so crazy."

Ostling said they came to the event in their first year as an undecided major, taking one of the art history classes, and the event showed them strong relationships in the program.

"I remember seeing seniors get ultra-specific books my freshman year, and I was like, 'Oh, I want that. I want a relationship like that, where somebody knows me that well, to give me an ultra-specific book.'"

For this year's mug design, Ostling said they were very happy with it and how it intertwined with the senior class' requests.

"This is amazing. This is adorable. We were like, 'Okay, we want flowers, and we want script, and we want it yellow,'" Ostling said. "Then purple was our second choice. But this is gorgeous. I'm very happy with it. I own every one since 2020, and that was well before I got here, and so I have a lot of them in my apartment."

Gatti said the book part of the celebration has existed in the program as long as she can remember and highlights what she said is the program's love language.

"The books are really important. So we try to save budget money so we can give them something, I mean, for some of them, something they wouldn't be able to buy on their own," Gatti said. "This year we gave them really new books, but sometimes we give them older classics that we think they wouldn't necessarily know to find or be able to find, just because we think it is a good match for them."

According to the Spring 2026 Elon Registrar's Report, there are 19 art history majors. Gatti said there were six senior art history majors this year. She said the smaller size of the major allows her to know all the students so well that she still gets at least one text from an alum each day.

"No one's majoring in art history because their parents told them to. So they're coming to us because they want to," Gatti said. "It's something they feel passionate about. They think it's going to help them in some specific way, and I really enjoy being able to work with those students."

For Jones, she said it is the faculty she will miss the most about the program.

"They are always willing to talk with me, give me advice, hold my hand, tell me to



MEGAN WALSH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Art History program seniors react to seeing this year's mug design at the Mugging celebration at Powell House on May 11.

toughen up, like all the things, they're just the best cheerleaders and advocates and also have taught me so much," Jones said. "I think I will really miss that sort of guidance, but hopefully they've given me the skill set to move forward and be able to do all those things on my own."

Jones said the Mugging celebration encapsulates the art history program and how the program acts as a constant in an ever-changing world.

"It's the cutest tradition ever. I love telling everyone about it. It's one of the most community-filled departments on campus," Jones said. "We're in this cute little house, like it literally is a home. And I mean that home, Powell House, is always on our mug, which I think is representative of just what is most important to us is cultivating that community and making sure we're listening to one another, and I feel like we cultivate that in the program too."

Backup keeper to finance professional: Soccer star closes out Elon career with no regrets



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Graduate goalie Jackson Leavitt yells from the goal during Elon's 1-0 win against William & Mary at Rudd Field on Nov. 1, 2025.

Coastal Athletic Association's top scholar prepares for post-grad finance career

Kathan Gandhi
Elon News Network

For five years, goalkeeper Jackson Leavitt built his life around Elon University.

The graduate student balanced late-night assignments, long road trips and years of waiting behind veteran goalkeepers before finally earning his opportunity as Elon men's soccer's starting goalkeeper this past season. Now, as graduation approaches, Leavitt is preparing to leave Elon behind and begin the next chapter of his life in finance.

After graduation, Leavitt will move back home to Dallas to begin working as a portfolio valuation analyst for Kroll, a

finance and risk advisory firm that assists other businesses in decision-making.

The move home carries extra weight for Leavitt. Because he spent each of the last three summers working internships in different cities, he said he has barely been home during his college career.

"I haven't been home three years now, because I've worked every summer somewhere else," Leavitt said. "I definitely wanted to be in Dallas because I have a lot of great friends back home, and I'll be closer to my parents."

For Leavitt, the job represents more than a career milestone. It is the culmination of five years spent trying to maximize every opportunity he had both on the field and in the classroom.

"I don't really want to regret anything," Leavitt said. "So I might as well try as hard as I can now and try to live with no regrets."

That mentality defined his time at Elon. Leavitt arrived at Elon unsure of exactly what academic path he wanted to pursue. During his freshman year, he explored a variety of courses before eventually narrowing his focus to finance and analytics — two fields that matched his longtime interests in technology and problem-solving.

"I'm actually a big computer guy," Leavitt said. "Complete nerd when it comes to computers and technology and stuff."

He eventually pursued a double major in finance and business analytics before professors encouraged him to stay for Elon's master's program as well.

While continuing graduate coursework, Leavitt also entered the most important athletic season of his college career.

For four seasons, Leavitt primarily served as a backup goalkeeper. Despite limited playing time, he stayed with the program and continued developing behind the scenes. By the time his final season arrived, he said he finally felt ready for the opportunity.

"I sat the bench for four years," Leavitt said. "Finally worked my way up to a starting position, and I don't regret what I did one bit."

This fall, Leavitt helped lead Elon men's soccer to its first Coastal Athletic Association championship during his first full season as the team's starter. He said

the championship carried extra meaning because of the teammates and former players who helped shape his journey.

"A lot of these guys were amazing at soccer," Leavitt said. "I just wanted to win it for them."

Leavitt said some of the most meaningful moments after the championship came from hearing from former teammates who had spent years chasing the same goal — though many also teased him after he dropped his CAA All-Tournament Team trophy on his hand during the celebration.

That award was one of many in a year filled with recognition for Leavitt. Earlier this spring, he was named the CAA Scholar-Athlete of the Year, recognizing the conference's top male student-athlete.

The honor reflected years of balancing academics and athletics simultaneously — something Leavitt said required constant discipline and communication.

"You're doing homework on a bus, you're doing homework on a plane before a plane takes off," he said.

He credited Elon professors and mentors for helping him manage the demands of being both a graduate student and Division I athlete.

"I think communication and honestly putting your head down and doing the work are the two things that really helped me succeed," he said.

Those same lessons now shape how Leavitt approaches his future career.

Before accepting his full-time role with Kroll, Leavitt completed internships with a private equity firm in Chicago and with aerospace and defense contractor Northrop Grumman in Baltimore. The experiences helped him better understand the type of environment he wanted after graduation.

At Northrop Grumman, much of his work involved independent spreadsheet and analytics projects. During his private equity internship in Chicago, he gained more experience interacting with coworkers and clients directly.

That combination of analytical work and communication ultimately drew him to Kroll's portfolio valuation analyst position.

"It's a finance role, and I get to work with a lot of people and a lot of companies," he said. "I just love client-facing work, which

is what I'll get to do."

Leavitt believes the communication and trust he developed through soccer will help him transition into the professional world. He said being part of a team taught him how to navigate different types of relationships, whether with coaches, teammates or future supervisors.



I'M NOT GOING TO MISS IT BECAUSE OF THE BUILDINGS OR STADIUMS. I THINK I'M GOING TO MISS THE PEOPLE.

JACKSON LEAVITT
MEN'S SOCCER GOALKEEPER

"You'll have trust in everyone, but how you act within that realm of trust is what I think I've learned pretty well here," he said.

Although Leavitt said he is ready for life after Elon, leaving campus after five years remains emotional.

Many of his closest friends already graduated last year, making this final season feel different from previous years. Still, Leavitt said the relationships he built through soccer and school are what he will remember most about Elon.

"I'm not going to miss it because of the buildings or stadiums," Leavitt said. "I think I'm going to miss the people."

As he prepares to leave Elon for Dallas and begin his career in finance, Leavitt said he feels proud of what he accomplished during his time with the Phoenix. Not because everything came easily, but because he stayed committed through the difficult moments.

"I'm ready, half a decade?" Leavitt said, laughing. "Yeah, definitely time to move on. I think in half a year, though, I'll probably look back, and really miss this place."

After five years as an Elon goalkeeper, graduate student and leader, Leavitt said he leaves Elon with the one thing he wanted most: no regrets.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Graduate goalie Jackson Leavitt stands on Rudd Field. Leavitt was named to the CAA-All Tournament team in 2025.