BLACK HISTORY MONTH

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RECOGNIZING BLACK HISTORY
THE PENDULUM SPECIAL EDITION
BLACK HISTORY MONTH EVENTS

**NPHC PANEL**
6 p.m. | Moseley 215

Are you interested in learning more about The Divine Nine and Multicultural organizations on campus? Join the NPHC panel featuring Elon faculty and staff, with representation across The Divine Nine.

**FILM SCREENING: “TWO GODS”**
5:30 p.m. | Turner Theatre, 123 Williamson Ave

Two Gods is a feature documentary film about a Muslim casket maker and ritual body washer in Newark, NJ who takes two young men under his wing to teach them how to live better lives.

**WOMANIST WISDOMS ON BLACK JOY**
6 p.m. | Zoom

This 4-course series will engage the definition of womanism and womanist theory to provide wisdom for the Elon community to immerse in and practice Black Joy as a praxis. This event is hosted by the CREDE.

**SUBCINEMA: QUEEN & SLIM**
8 p.m. | Turner Theatre, 123 Williamson Ave

SUBCinema is playing movies that are relevant to Black History Month. Queen & Slim is about a couple’s first date that takes an unexpected turn when a police officer pulls them over.

**BLACK HISTORY MONTH DANCE CONCERT**
7 p.m. | Turner Theatre, 123 Williamson Ave

Elon’s Department of Performing Arts will do a screening of their Black History Month performance.

**BLACK TABLE TALK: BLACK JOY**
12-2 p.m. | Moseley 217

This is an opportunity for the Black student population to enter into a space and embrace the love for themselves and their community. This will serve as a moment to reflect in a safe space, express a sense of joy and fulfill one’s cup and passion.

**HIGH ON THE HOG: HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN CUISINE TRANSFORMED AMERICA**
5 p.m. | Turner Theatre, 123 Williamson Ave

Join the CREDE and the Office of Sustainability for the first episode of Netflix’s four-part series High On The Hog: How African American Cuisine Transformed America. This documentary series is a joyful exploration of the rich history of Black heritage cooking and how it has influenced American cuisine.

**SUBCINEMA: “JUST MERCY”**
8 p.m. | Turner Theatre, 123 Williamson Ave

SUBCinema will be playing movies that are relevant to Black History Month. Just Mercy is about Bryan Stevenson who heads to Alabama to defend those wrongly condemned or not afforded proper representation.

**BLACK ALAMANCE COUNTY AWARDS**
7:30 p.m. | Mebane Arts Center

The first Black Alamance County Awards mission is to celebrate Black owned and operated businesses, serving as a recognition platform for nominees while encouraging the community’s next generation of Black business leaders.

**BLACK SOLIDARITY DAY: A BLACK JOY LOVE LETTER**
12-8 p.m. | Moseley

The Elon University Black Solidarity Conference aims to unite Black-identifying students, faculty, and staff by providing an avenue through which Black identity, Black intersectionality, and building solidarity are explored. This year will offer an alllayship, anti-racism, anti-black racism track designed specifically for non-black identified participants who want to learn more about anti-Blackness, oppression, power, privilege, and ways in which they can be better allies with Black communities.

**MOVIE SCREENING & FELLOWSHIP**
6 p.m. | Pleasant Grove Recreation Center

Join the Down Home Alamance chapter for a family-friendly event. There will be a screening of “Swing State,” a new film directed by Nathaniel Frum and starring, for better or for worse, Alamance County. Food, drinks and crafts will be provided.

**VIGIL FOR WYATT OUTLAW**
6 p.m. | South Side of the Historic Courthouse, Graham

A service of prayer and hope that will honor and recognize Wyatt Outlaw, who was the first African American to serve as Town Commissioner and Constable of the town of Graham, North Carolina. He was lynched by the White Brotherhood. Candles available, flashlights welcome.
Letter from Christina Carr, President of Elon University’s Black Student Union

Christina Carr

THIS BLACK HISTORY MONTH, I am celebrating with reflection. I am taking the month to think about the rooms that I sit in, the opportunities I am given and the trials and tribulations I have faced. I am celebrating Black history by challenging the status quo, practicing resistance and being unapologetically myself.

I am celebrating Black history by learning and expanding my mind. I am celebrating Black history by supporting my fellow peers of color, faculty, staff and the other figures in my life. I am taking the month to give back and to pour into others.

I am celebrating this year as the president of the Black Student Union by inviting you to join me in not just celebrating throughout this month, but every day.

I want to invite you to take this time to be introspective in your own life and to examine the classrooms you sit in, the places you live and challenge the perspectives. To take time to be engulfed and inspired by the words of revolutionaries from our past and today.

I hope that students at Elon take this as an opportunity to get out of their comfort zone. Take a trip to the CREDE, stop by the BSU office, engage in new spaces on campus and with your peers. Take a look at what’s happening in the surrounding area and get more involved. Be inspired to reflect, learn, challenge, embrace and spread joy this Black History Month.

1963 - FIRST BLACK FULL-TIME STUDENT AT ELON

Glenda Phillips Hightower became the first full-time Black student to attend Elon College. “I was not afraid,” Hightower said at an Elon University event in 2014. Her graduation was prevented by illness, but she received an honorary doctorate of humane letters from Elon University in April 2019.

1970 - FIRST BLACK FEMALE GRADUATE

Gail Fousville became the first Black woman to graduate from Elon. Her legacy is commemorated in the Gail Fousville Parker ’70 Distinguished Alumna Award, which honors the achievements of female members of Elon’s Black Alumni Network.

1974 - CREATION OF THE BLACK CULTURAL SOCIETY

The Black Cultural Society was created in 1974 to strengthen unity, awareness and appreciation among Elon’s Black students. Pictured are the members of the 1974 Black Cultural Society.

1978 - FIRST BLACK PENDULUM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Bryant Colson became the first Black editor-in-chief of The Pendulum, Elon University’s student-run newspaper. In 1979, Colson would also be named as the first Black student body president.

1984 - FIRST BLACK FRATERNITY ESTABLISHED

The Sigma Mu chapter of the Omega Psi Phi fraternity became the first historically Black Greek fraternity chartered on Elon’s campus. The fraternity upholds the values of manhood, scholarship, perseverance and uplift.

1992 - AFRICAN AMERICAN RESOURCE ROOM FOUNDED

The African American Resource Room was established with the goal of providing resources to the Black community at Elon. Founded originally in Chandler Residence Hall, it was moved to Mosley Center in 1994 and became the Center for Race, Ethnicity, & Diversity in 2014.

1998 - FIRST BLACK FEMALE SUB PRESIDENT

Sherrika Stanley became the first Black female president of the Student Union Board.
Teaching African American studies and critical race theory proves challenging for some Elon professors.

Caroline Mitchell
Design Chief

A professor, a woman and an immigrant.

Those three intersecting identities allow English professor Prudence Layne to tell her life story and teach African American studies at Elon University. Layne’s 22 years teaching at Elon have taught her many things, but if there is anything that has stood out, it’s that education surrounding African American and Black history is overlooked.

“There is a kind of fairytale construction of the story of Black history,” Layne said. “It’s a story and a narrative that a lot of people don’t know.”

Layne said she is often asked the question, “Why is it African and African American?” when students are referring to different types of studies. Questions like these can sometimes lead to discrepancies in the U.S. education system. Throughout her time at Elon, Layne said she has seen firsthand how the education system has disregarded the importance of African American literature and history.

Layne’s background — originally from the Caribbean but grew up living between the United States, Faroe Islands of Denmark and Barbados — allowed her to have a diverse education during her secondary and higher education years. Her experiences of living in different communities allow her to have a greater understanding of diversity — something she brings to Elon.

“I felt empowered to talk about race,” Layne said. “We make sure that we don’t talk about these as difficult conversations, it’s like riding a bike — it’s only hard when you aren’t practiced.”

Layne often encounters students at the university who have little-to-no background in either African American studies or history, primarily because many of their K-12 education systems regaled the study of those histories. A major example of this is when a North Carolina school district banned critical race theory from their classrooms back in 2021.

Unlike Layne, associate professor of education at Elon’s School of Education Lisa Buchanan did not experience diversity in her education.

“Prior to graduate school, I had a largely incomplete knowledge of African American history,” Buchanan wrote in an email to Elon News Network. “What I did know was things about Black history, rather than learning about the world around me through Black history.”

Buchanan wrote that African American history is often taught about rather than taught through. She has seen elements of history censored in the general education system, which is why many students at Elon and other institutions have a lack of prior knowledge about America’s history.

Both Layne and Buchanan believe that the collegiate and K-12 education systems fail to teach important details about American history that have a connection to African American history or culture. According to Layne, there are differences between each of the African American cultures, and there are different fields of study for each culture. She said that subjects should be taught individually, but instead they have been intertwined with each other.

An observation Layne quickly made when she started teaching was that learning about new perspectives is important early in her career. Layne said she could feel she was “pushing against the tide” when teaching some students. She felt like she didn’t have a universal set of open minds to teach to Layne asks her students to look at their own privileges and experiences as a source of empowerment to make a difference.

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Two cases to be heard by the Supreme Court next term seek to end race-conscious admissions in higher education

Sophie Rosenthal
Staff Writer | The Elon News Network

Junior Kennedy Boston knew her race was a big part of her identity when she was applying to colleges. At Elon University and other predominantly white institutions, Boston said, seeing the influence of her race would appear on her applications.

“I knew that they would look at my application and be like, ‘Oh, she’s Black,’” Boston said. “That would be a stand-out piece of my own application. And inherently, that would change views, or maybe not, but it would at least play some level of consideration in how I was viewed in the admissions process.”

Race-conscious admissions have long been used in higher education as a form of affirmative action — policies or practices used to include minority groups in areas where they have been historically underrepresented. But it is not without controversy. Race-conscious admissions have been challenged many times over the years, going all the way to the Supreme Court on multiple occasions.

Now, but for Fair Admissions, a conservative advocacy group, is taking two universities to the country’s highest court in an attempt to end race-conscious admissions altogether.

Elon Law professor and alumna Tiffany Atkins, who teaches Race Law to second and third year law students, said past challenges — such as University of California Regents v. Bakke, Grutter v. Bollinger and Fisher v. University of Texas — have resulted in Supreme Court precedent that higher education institutions in what capacity they can consider race in admissions.

“We know that you can’t just use race to fill a quota. You can’t say, ‘We need 20 Black students, go find me any 20,’” Atkins said. “The court said that’s inefficient, that’s unconstitutional. But the use of race as a factor in admissions and schools, depending on their history and their own history with racial exclusion — can modify that to an extent.”

SFFA filed two similar suits against Harvard College and the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill in 2014. Both cases came up the court again in the court’s docket system until 2021, when the Supreme Court agreed to hear them in their next term.

Part of SFFA’s argument relies on the precedent from the 2013 case Grutter v. Bollinger. In Grutter, the court held that the University of Michigan Law School could use race as a soft positive factor in their admissions process — setting the precedent that race-conscious admissions are constitutional when race is just one factor in a process that gives individualized consideration to each applicant.

The two current cases are arguing that the Supreme Court should overturn Grutter and rule that higher education institutions cannot consider an applicant’s race at all in their admissions processes.

Grutter established what Atkins calls a “race plus” admissions model; a university can say race is a soft positive, or a “plus,” on an application, but race cannot be the reason the applicant gets in.

Atkins said she thinks when schools acknowledge a lack of representation in themselves, the “race plus” model is the best way to conduct race-conscious admissions.

“If a school knows that it has a history of excluding black students, other students of color, so they prioritize inclusion of those groups, I think that’s fair,” Atkins said. “And the Supreme Court tells us that you can do that.”

But SFFA is arguing that not even a “race plus” model should be used.

The group’s case against Harvard College introduces a “Kimberly Romero” model that Harvard’s admissions uses. When reviewing applications, Harvard gave positive or negative weight to subjective personality factors. Looking at individual applications, SFFA said Harvard’s admissions officers gave Asian American applicants negative personality factors that offset their academic records. SFFA alleged that doing so allowed them to impose a soft racial quota to limit the amount of Asian Americans they admit. From this, SFFA is arguing that a race blind admissions process would be more fair.

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Tiffany Atkins
ELON LAW PROFESSOR AND ALUMNA

At Elon, race is one of a variety of factors considered in an applicant’s profile, according to Greg Zaiser, vice president of enrollment and Romero was director of admissions for diversity and access. They said the Elon admissions office is intentional with its recruitment diversity efforts.

“But our university values and the Boldly Elon strategic plan, we seek to build a class of students from different backgrounds, perspectives and areas of the world,” Zaiser and Romero wrote to Elon News Network. “This is a demonstration ability to be successful in the Elon classroom as evidenced by the high school record.”

Boston said she’s not sure how much race is being considered because the population of students of color at Elon is so small.

“There’s so few of us here already that I’m like, ‘Is it even playing a role at all?’” Boston said.

To Boston, the “race plus” system is flawed. The system subjectively attaches a numerical value to an identity, she said.

“I think assigning a value to race and its experiences is just not going to work,” Boston said. “To add a value of how much of a plus that is, I think, doesn’t work because it negates so many experiences based on people’s individualized experiences and races.”

What makes one of these cases seemingly unique from previous challenges is that this is the first time the court has considered a challenge to a private institution. Typically, the court does not hear civil rights cases involving private entities, raising two questions. First, whether the Supreme Court has jurisdiction over Harvard, and second, if the precedent set will apply to all private colleges and universities, such as Elon.

The answers go together. The second part of SFFA’s argument is that UNC Chapel Hill and Harvard are violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination in educational institutions. According to Atkins, private institutions that receive any federal funding are subject to the act. Since Harvard receives federal funding, the Supreme Court does have jurisdiction over the school. This means that not only can it be subject to lawsuits, but it is also held to the court’s previous precedents.

Elon, which does receive public funding, is also held to the same standard.

“What the Civil Rights Act of ’64 said is that we’re no longer allowing it to the states to decide which rules they follow and which they don’t, how they treat people based on race, gender and other identifying demographics or identifying characteristics,” Atkins said.

If the Supreme Court overturns Grutter, it will set a new precedent that race cannot be considered in higher education admissions at all. But Zaiser and Romero believe that in the case will have as great of an impact on Elon as it would on more competitive private institutions like Harvard.

“Much of the attention on Harvard and other schools is a function of their extremely high rate of selectivity. In a sense, selectivity is just juxtapose to inclusion,” Zaiser and Romero wrote. “We’re searching for students who will be successful at Elon and our acceptance rate reflects that.”

The last time the Supreme Court heard a race-conscious admissions case was six years ago, in the 2016 case Fisher v. University of Texas. But Atkins said the court didn’t decide to hear these challenges so soon after because they present a unique or different problem from previous cases. Instead, it has to do with the recent changes in the ideological composition of the justices themselves. The sitting justices today may make a different decision from courts of the past.

“The politicking, as we would say here, is that we now have this super conservative Court,” Atkins said. “The balance of power has shifted.”

SFFA took advantage of this, appealing to the ideals of a court that now more widely represents its own.

Atkins recalled a 2003 statement from Justice Sandra Day O’Connor after Grutter, where she said she believed that in 25 years, higher education institutions would no longer need to use affirmative action.

“Twenty-five years from then will be 2028. So we’re coming up on this date that Justice O’Connor said we shouldn’t need to use this anymore,” Atkins said. “I think she was wrong to put a date on it, because you can’t eradicate centuries upon centuries of explicit discrimination against Black people, and other people of color, with just 25 years of race-conscious remedy.”

No matter what happens to race-conscious admissions in the next term of the Supreme Court, Boston said she thinks the system needs an update nationally.

“I truly believe that these intentions were good. And what it was initially doing was positive,” Boston said. “But it has morphed into something that’s a little less positive.

… So I think it is another thing that we tried and it didn’t work as intended, so we either rework it or get rid of it as a whole.”
Burlington residents who are part of the Black community look for spaces for civic engagement, learning areas

Nyah Phengsitthy
Managing Editor | @nyahphengsitthy

Driving down North Graham Hopedale Road in Burlington, Seneca Rogers passes by the former Western Electric Company-Tarheel Army Missile Plant. Rogers, who is currently running for Alamance Board of Education, hopes that the area can one day turn into something else — a Black community space. The lifelong Burlington resident observed community hubs, such as the Mayo Bigelow Community Center at North Park and the CityGate Dream Center, serving as a meeting place for the many Black community members as he grew up and still does today.

But those spaces aren’t enough.

According to Rogers, the need for more meeting spaces throughout Burlington has been a goal for many members of the Black community. These spaces can be used for civic engagement, meetings with personal agendas and, most importantly, a place to express voices. During the start of his Board of Education campaign, Rogers said local parents and other Black community members expressed concerns over not having a voice in the community. These future spaces can hopefully combat that issue.

“...you have these parents who might not be able to show up to a board meeting, or show up to an actual meeting at the school because of the fact that they’re having to work or they’re having to take care of a family member,” Rogers said. “It just seems like nobody cares because we’re not the ones loud and yelling at the school board meeting.”

The goal for more spaces is to also educate Black community members about politics in Alamance County — one thing Dreama Caldwell wishes she had before running for Alamance County Commissioner in 2020. Caldwell said her personal experience in a county race is one she hopes others will never have to go through.

“There isn’t a pipeline of Black candidates to reach out to have experience to talk about,” Caldwell said. “One of the things I try to do now is when I hear that Black candidates are going to run, I have conversations and say, ‘OK, these are some things you might want to do.’ These are some things you need to consider.”

As the executive co-director of Down Home North Carolina, a nonprofit organization created to build multi-racial power for working people in the state’s small towns and rural regions, Caldwell hopes to use the organization’s space to bring more Black leaders together in the meantime.

Informing community members beyond politics is also a goal for these spaces, especially about Black history, according to Donna Vanhook — the first Black woman to run for mayor of Burlington in 2021. In a study published in February 2022 by the Pew Research Center on Black Americans, nearly nine in every 10 Black Americans said they are at least somewhat informed about Black History. — 51% say they are very or extremely informed, 37% said they are somewhat informed and 11% said they are a little or not informed at all. Vanhook said these Black spaces will educate others more about Black history.

“Historically, Black spaces have been limited,” Vanhook said. “It’s not a feeling we have a lot — having that Black space feeling safe.”

Rogers said the next steps to creating these safe spaces is to push future candidates running in races in Burlington and surrounding counties to go into neighborhoods more, especially east Burlington. The idea of turning the former Western Electric property into a community center will seek voter engagement, racial justice and promote Black and minority businesses. Many of these events begin with finding things that bring the community together.

“The goal is to continually find things to hold this community together to do things,” Caldwell said. “We want to be a space that can continue to grow. And as we listen to the community, this is a space of shared power.”

Rogers speaks with Burlington resident Donna Vanhook about the possibilities for the future of the Western Electric property. Vanhook was the first Black woman to run for mayor of Burlington in 2021.
You were the first Black editor-in-chief of The Pendulum and the first Black SGA president; what were some obstacles you faced by making those accomplishments?

What went through my mind at that time was being able to garner enough votes to get me over the hump. I knew I had the communities in which I hung in — I figured it was about 150 [Black students], so I can count on many of those votes. But at that time, I guess my senior year, 1980, there were about 2,577 students on campus and there were 214 [Black students]. So now I know those numbers. I didn't know them then. But I sure was counting on those 150 that I thought I had back then. And in my community of athletes, they let me hang with them, though I wasn't an athlete.

I played a decent game of baseball back in the day, as my dad played in the Negro Leagues in Greensboro. But I figured I could count on them — So ironically, or not ironically, good that I had those votes, because it did get me over the hump — I wasn't too naive to know that, we had apathy in the student body or disinterested — who cares about student government unless you're putting on a concert — but those communities got me over the hump and thankfully, I won and it was fun.

Can you talk more about the communities you had? Especially because here at Elon, we really value those cohort experiences?

I had probably about three or so communities that let me hang with them. The Black community of course, the 214 of us. We were a close-knit family because we were, as we used to say back then, 'we were all we had.' So we were tight. I remember the snowstorm of 1979. The school was telling us 'if you can go home because we can't assure you that cafeteria workers, professors, administrators would be here and classes are certainly canceled.' But crazy us, a few of us, especially my athletics circle, we stayed and boy, were we crazy. We thought we were getting warm by going down to Bell Gym and getting in the pool without realizing that we had to get out of the warm pool and walk back to the dorm in the cold.

How — specifically in the roles that you were in SGA president and editor-in-chief of the Pendulum — did you take everything that you learned from those roles into your professional life?

When I decided to apply for The Pendulum position, I was prompted by the previous editor, Kemp Liles, and the adviser, Dr. Mary Ellen Priestley, she was a sweetheart. But she was always on me, telling me that it was something that I can do. I didn't have all of the confidence that I probably shouldn't have. But I ended up with a ton, and I can't be more grateful for Dr. Priestley, Kemp and then coordinator of student activities, Bill Sharp. He was a humongous supporter back in the day for me. Those three talked me into The Pendulum opportunity. That actually all started with my freshman English teacher, who used to always tell me I should consider writing for The Pendulum. Because when we had papers to write, mine tended to be about sports. And she asked me, 'You oughta consider doing that, Bryant.' I took that under advisement and, of course, as you can see, I did do it.

I was student body president of my school when I was in elementary school, sixth grade. I was into student government in back then junior high school — Paige High School. I was into student government all my years there, so it was just ingrained in me. I don't know how much of a leader I was but it certainly helped me, gave me the confidence even to want to do it here along with being pushed with my SGA community and advisers. So that got me going, especially the writing part. That was so important: the ability to write. Whether you are managing people, you have employee reviews to write. We didn't have it back then, but emails. And you want to make sure to the people that it needs to make sense to. Those were important things to me. Another thing that was really, really good and it was a blessing and not so much a disguise was, after I got in this position, I was not aware that the Pendulum position paid a stipend. I mean they're paying me to do something I like. As I was telling the young lady earlier, find something that you love and call it work and put a little money in the plate at work. I would send, I would send half home to my mother and I'd put half in my checking account here. SGA the same thing — a stipend. I couldn't believe that. So I split it right down the middle, sent half home to my mother and I put the other half in my account here on campus. That was gravy, you know, icing on the cake.

How do you go about celebrating Black History Month each year? And how should we as a campus go about celebrating?

Well, I actually don't mean this to sound too cheesy, but Black history to me, I celebrate every day. There's something on TV, some person that you meet, somebody that you talk to, that makes you proud to be Black. Abby Phillip, CNN news analyst — smart lady; old school Donna Brazile, chaired the Gore campaign and chaired the Democratic National Committee — smart lady; Laura Coates; I mean, these are smart people I see on TV every day and what's not to be proud about to be Black?

I remember having to tell friends, and my girls when they were younger, I would hear at times, and hopefully they were being facetious, that why in the world did they pick the shortest month to let us celebrate our people? 29 whole days, 28 whole days. Well, you know what? That wasn't the choice, as I tried to explain to them. Ironically, a gentleman by the name of Carter Woodson, the second Black person to get a PhD at Harvard, started a Negro History Week in February back in 1926, where he would tout the accomplishments of Black people and negroes back then. It wasn't given to him. He chose that month because it had the birthdays of iconic people at that time. Abraham Lincoln — February 12. Frederick Douglas — February 14. That's why he chose that month. And fast forward to Gerald Ford in 1976, where he made it a month-long annual celebration.
Elon University junior Hunter McIntosh is not only a leader on the men’s basketball team at Elon, but in the community as well as he serves on the Black Student Union board and analyzes the culture surrounding race at Elon.

Is there anything that you would like to see changed specifically at Elon?

“There’s tons of different groups, tons of different communities, whether it’s fraternities, sororities or on campus groups or clubs, I’d probably like to see a lot more mixing of those. I feel like every group or something has something to offer … I feel like just as people, we have a lot more similarities than differences. Sometimes it happens naturally, but sometimes you need to have spaces and stuff where different types of groups and communities can come together.”

Do you know how we as a community start that process?

“I think you want to do it more naturally, more organic, so it’s not forced upon each other. I think initially, maybe just kind of informal things like a food gathering or a picnic or something where it’s kind of a little less [formal], it doesn’t feel as forced upon people to connect with others. I think that’s where the best kind of genuine relationships are formed.”

Can you talk about the team, and your message as a team?

“As a team we feel like we have a voice. People kind of gravitate toward our team and want to watch us and watch us compete, but we also know it’s bigger than basketball. Life is bigger than basketball. So any point where we feel like we could take a stance against injustice, take a stance against racism, stuff like that, we want to be able to do that.”

Has anything similar to [the meeting with all of athletics about racism] happened since last year? Or has it been on you guys to continue that message of last summer through into this year as well?

“I think the onus is on us as players and students to continue that message … The responsibility weighs on us a little more, but I kind of don’t see that as a problem. I think that we are the ones who are pushing the narrative forward, and I feel like it’s important that the ball should be in our court. If you want to take responsibility of pushing this university forward, it’s gonna start with the students.”

I do want to ask if you feel any pressure, not only as a Black man, but also as a student athlete, do you ever feel that you’re kind of getting double stereotyped from both of those identities?

“You can get a sense where other students might have other preconceived notions as an athlete about what type of person you are. I feel like that’s just unfair sometimes. We love basketball, but we all have different interests outside of sports … kind of being an African American male on campus, there is society’s pressure on yourself not just to be able to come here and perform on the court, but off the court, how you carry yourself. There’s obviously moments, you’re already a minority on campus, you already stick out a little bit whether it’s in classrooms, or just walking around campus … I don’t want to say that it’s a pressure that is harmful in a sense, but I feel like it can be overwhelming at some points.”

As a campus, what can we do to start to improve relationships with each other, relationships with the outside community, how do we start to make those connections?

“Any genuine connection, it comes down to just trust and belief. When you want to start new relationships, it’s going to be uncomfortable at first, it’s going to be something challenging, but I think a little effort could go a long way … Just keep showing up, I think that’s just really the biggest thing. If you’re uncomfortable in another group’s space, obviously you’re welcome, just keeps showing up. It’s not going to be the most fun sometimes, but over time when you’re growing in a relationship, that’s where the real, genuine stuff happens … Put your pride to the side. I think sometimes, it can be like, ‘Alright, this is my way or my way of thinking,’ but I think if you accept that’s how this person thinks or this is how they feel and you genuinely try to understand that and just be open to it. It’s tough sometimes, but I think if you really put the extra effort in there, it will go a long way.”
Building and campus growth at the forefront of Elon University’s goals, brings sustainability initiatives into question
Samantha Hess
Elon News Network

Every morning, the droning beep of a crane backing up can be heard around Elon University’s campus as the Innovation Quad construction crew begins its day of work. Students walking past cross to the opposite side of the road to avoid dirt kicked up from the construction site, and crane their necks to see what’s really going on inside.

The new building is just a small part of campus growth the university hopes to accomplish over the coming years. Elon’s campus master plan, created in 2016, outlines the projected avenues of campus growth for the foreseeable future and provides a structure for what construction projects the university will work on and when.

This campus growth has serious sustainability implications not only due to the larger student population it will bring in, but also because of the facilities themselves. Buildings accounted for 40% of the country’s total energy consumption in 2020, 30% of which can be attributed to coal-burning power plants, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Elon University’s Sustainability Master Plan attempts to solve this, outlining the university’s sustainability goals for the foreseeable future, including a goal for a carbon neutral university by 2037. According to Elaine Durr, director of Sustainability at Elon, active construction on campus does not get reported as part of the university’s net carbon emissions.

“Elon does not include carbon emissions from construction projects in the annual carbon inventory,” Durr said. “The primary way buildings are represented in Elon’s annual carbon inventory is through energy consumption.”

The sustainability plan also incorporates the Elon Green Building Policy from 2009, which says any new construction or renovations exceeding 8,000 square feet of conditioned, occupied space will achieve LEED certification, preferably at the Silver level.

Concert aims to raise $10,000 for the Make A Wish Foundation
Betsy Schlehauer
Elon News Network

As the sun sets on Spence Pavilion, people walking by can hear the sounds of singing and beat-boxing emanating from within. This is typical of a Thursday night Vital Signs rehearsal, but now the group is not just practicing — they are preparing for a concert.

Vital Signs, a co-ed a cappella group at Elon University, is hosting their ninth annual Make-A-Wish fundraiser concert at 7 p.m. on Feb. 19 in Whitley Auditorium. This is one of three concerts Vital Signs performs throughout the academic year. Their fundraising goal, same as every year, is $10,000.

According to junior and Vital Signs President Macey Bischoff, the Make-A-Wish fundraiser concert was started by Vital Signs alumnus Nick Cook. Cook’s sister, Bella, was very involved with Make-A-Wish. Cook noticed how much of an effect Make-A-Wish had on Bella and decided to start this fundraiser, which has become a Vital Signs tradition.

All sites of Elon’s a cappella groups and two visiting groups from North Carolina State University will perform at the concert. The visiting groups are Ladies in Red, which is an all-female group, and Grains of Time, an all-male group. Elon’s groups will each perform two songs and N.C. State’s groups will perform three songs.

“It’s really probably the biggest and most rewarding concert we get to do, especially with all of Elon a cappella getting involved. It really brings the whole Elon community together,” Bischoff said. “It kind of shows Elon what a cappella can really do and what we’re about, and it’s a really good chance for us to show how much we care about charity and how much we are working toward.”

See SUSTAINABILITY | pg. 4B
In recent months, Russia has amassed troops on the Ukrainian border with both Russia and Belarus, increasing tensions between Russia and Ukraine. Russia previously annexed the Crimean peninsula after a referendum in 2014. Fighting has continued to occur in Eastern Ukraine for the past seven years between Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed separatists which have occupied the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine since 2014. Jason Kirk provided historical context on this ongoing situation and is an expert in international relations and politics relating to India and is a professor of political science and policy studies at Elon University. Kirk discusses the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine. This interview has been edited for clarity.

What events in the past have set the stage for tension between Russia and Ukraine?

"Well this goes back to at least 2014 and the so-called Maidan Revolution in Kyiv in Ukraine... But that really involved what Ukraine’s relationship to Europe would be, and whether it would be really have a pro-Russian leadership or a pro-Western leadership major demonstrations in a really big event that followed was Russia’s annexation of Crimea, which had been Ukrainian since the breakup of the Soviet Union. It’s something that the United States and NATO Allies were against and really still haven’t recognized, but Russia has made it the ground reality ever since. Russia historically was always interested in a warm water port, you have that there (in Sevastopol). The other thing that began in 2014, and has been going on ever since was massed in the Donbas, which is eastern Ukraine, bordering Russia, where you got pro-Russian Ukrainians, Russian
Freshman Morris Ni helps sophomore Cayla Bellamy write Chinese calligraphy during the Lunar New Year celebration on Feb. 11. The event was hosted by the Elon Asian Pacific Student Association inside Numen Lumen.

Elon students play frisbee inside the Moseley Center during the Spring Organization Fair on Feb. 10.

Senior Chuck Hannah and sophomore Michael Graham rush toward the ball against the James Madison University Dukes during their away game at the Atlantic Union Bank Center in Harrisonburg, Virginia, on Feb. 10, where they both scored six points during the game. The Phoenix beat the Dukes 70-66 and won their first away game of the season.

Elon softball players watch from the dugout at Hunt Park on Feb. 11 during the game against Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. The Phoenix won 9-2.
LEED certification seeks to remedy concerns

LEED, or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is the leading green building certification and rating system in the United States. Implemented by the U.S. Green Building Council, there are four different levels of certification buildings can achieve, from basic certification up to Silver, Gold and Platinum. Each level requires a different set of checklists a building must reach in order to qualify for that certification status, with Platinum certification being considered most sustainable.

“LEED certification provides a third-party verification of the strategies incorporated into the project, which provides credibility,” Durr said. “LEED certified buildings are typically more resource efficient than non-LEED certified buildings.”

But, you know, we can’t meet our mission seriously and do produce more sustainable buildings, but that’s in their own good nature and not necessarily a benefit of LEED certified buildings.

“LEED allows for tax breaks for many developers and companies but does very little to help the environment,” Leidner said. “There are some firms that take LEED seriously and do produce more sustainable buildings, but that’s in their own good nature and not necessarily a benefit of getting LEED certified.”

Some of the struggles behind making these lasting sustainability changes to college campuses are rooted in the finances. Not only is it expensive to invest more in sustainable construction and architecture, but it’s especially more expensive to keep that up once the construction is over and the building is occupied.

“We can’t meet our mission of educating future generations if we’re not growing,” Moore said. “There are some firms that take LEED seriously and do produce more sustainable buildings, but that’s in their own good nature and not necessarily a benefit of getting LEED certified.”

Some of the struggles behind making these lasting sustainability changes to college campuses are rooted in the finances. Not only is it expensive to invest more in sustainable construction and architecture, but it’s especially more expensive to keep that up once the construction is over and the building is occupied.

Julian Deautremont, director of programs for AASHE, said for the majority of universities reporting to Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System, their financial situations prevent them from truly investing in sustainable technology that would make those differences on campus.

“Investment and finance come to mind, which have a couple questions about how the endowment is managed, and socially responsible investing, which is a tricky issue in many campuses, right, where historically the endowment has been invested to achieve financial return, and that is the primary or even a sole goal of the endowment management,” Deautremont said. “STARS is rewarding points for social and environmental considerations in that process.”

According to AASHE, at Elon University only 2.6% of the institution’s investment pool goes into positive sustainability investments, and in terms of a committee on investor responsibility and investment disclosure, “the two other subheads under the investment and finance section of STARS — there were no points awarded to the university.”

In order to grow the university in the way outlined in the campus master plan, sustainability is something that becomes a struggle sometimes, especially with recent supply chain issues due to COVID-19, according to Moore. The struggle towards a campus that is both larger and more sustainable, a dynamic that seems to contradict itself.

“I guess the most sustainable thing to do would be to not do any construction,” Moore said. “So given that we have to do construction, then we look at how we can limit the environmental impact for the future, even in the smallest ways.”
Vital Signs organizer and senior Miles Caraballo put together this event for the third year in a row. Though the concert was to be in person his first year organizing, the COVID-19 pandemic made the concert virtual in his second year, with groups from California, New York and the United Kingdom participating. This year, though Caraballo is still taking COVID-19 precautions, he was able to organize an in-person concert once again.

“It’s been a little bit of a challenge, but it doesn’t really take the fun out of it,” Caraballo said. “I still get to have fun and communicate with the groups in the ways that I’ve been communicating in the past.”

All a cappella groups are required to get tested for COVID-19 within 48 hours of the concert in order to perform without a mask.

Halfway through the concert, young Make-A-Wish recipients will share their stories on stage and express what the organization has done for them. This year, Sarah, who is active in her school’s chorus, will take the stage. Bischoff said the concert will inspire both the audience and kids like Sarah, who not only get to hear her story but see other kids do what she loves on stage.

“For any Make-A-Wish kid, it’s obviously inspiring to see older kids like us just doing things in groups in a college setting, whether they have music involved in their lives or not,” Bischoff said. “It’s just a really cool thing to see a huge group of kids coming together to support something like the Make-A-Wish Foundation, which is so helpful to kids with critical illnesses.”

Caraballo said he is most excited for “The Love Medley,” the last song on the entire setlist. This medley is Valentine’s Day themed since the concert happens to fall around Valentine’s Day. “The Love Medley” ends with “Somebody to Love,” where all the a cappella groups sing together from the stage and balconies, creating a surround-sound effect.

“There’s over 100 singers singing one song together in Whitley, and it’s just a very magical moment … I’m getting chills thinking about it right now from two years ago, from when I was on stage,” Caraballo said. “It was like, ‘I’ll be fine,’ but then when I started singing it and everybody was singing around me, I couldn’t sing just because I was like, ‘This is literally crazy.’”

Pi Kappa Phi National Fraternity has placed this ad to provide notice that the Pi Kapp chapter at Elon has been closed since 2020. Students who were members of the Fraternity no longer have authority to operate as a Pi Kappa Phi chapter and may not organize any event, sponsor any activity, or participate in any endeavor representing Pi Kappa Phi on the Elon campus or elsewhere in the Elon community. Additionally, “Old Pi Kappa” (OPK) and “New Pi Kapp” (NPK) are in no way affiliated with Pi Kappa Phi.

“Pi Kappa Phi” and other distinctive letters, marks and insignia of the Fraternity are federally protected trademarks owned and managed by Pi Kappa Phi National Fraternity. Any use of these marks without the express written permission of Pi Kappa Phi National Fraternity is strictly prohibited. No group of students at Elon is authorized to use the name “Pi Kappa Phi” or any of its service marks. Only chartered chapters and qualified members of Pi Kappa Phi are authorized to operate a chapter and use the distinctive marks of the Fraternity.

If you have reason to believe that students on campus continue to operate as though they make up a recognized chapter of Pi Kappa Phi, please alert the Dean of Students office and Student Involvement Office or contact Pi Kappa Phi National Fraternity.
Spotlighting queer theater through a series of interactive workshops

Lumen Scholar’s goal to highlight queer identity within theater spaces

Jess Baker

Junior Jack Morrill told workshop attendees that this was to be viewed as a safe space — cameras were optional and everything was done anonymously, beginning with a grounding activity. Participants were invited to center themselves by thinking about natural spaces, clearing their minds and breathing deeply before partaking in a 90-minute Zoom call about queer identity within theater.

This was the first of three “Queering the Stage” workshops brought to Elon University by Morrill’s Lumen project. His ultimate goal is to bring queer artists and theater professionals to Elon through a series of interactive Zooms to engage with students and faculty. On Feb. 4, the first workshop, entitled “Breaking the Binary” was presented by theater professionals SK Kerastas and Lisa/August Evans. Both Evans and Kerastas identify as nonbinary, and Evans uses both Lisa and August to represent both parts of their identity.

But in order to break the binary, Kerastas and Evans first had to define it. To facilitate their talk, Evans and Kerastas provided working definitions of such terms as queer, gender, sexual orientation and transgender identity. Kerastas and Evans used the website Padlet to allow for anonymous answers to focus questions throughout the workshop as well as Google Jamboard to create the idea of a “fuzzy binary,” according to Kerastas.

“To create the space for everyone to be their full selves and supported and honored in intersectional ways, it actually disturbs the system,” Kerastas said. “Which is maybe not a bad thing. It doesn’t have to happen all at once, but that’s actually part of the point. Because the systems that we operate under now are built to service few, and not everyone.”

The workshop spoke broadly at first about queer identity and experiences before honing in on what it means to be a queer performer in a “traditionally heteronormative” dominant culture, according to Evans.

“What is important for students because it’s important for them to know that there are queer artists out there. There are people who are doing work that they might be interested in doing. That they don’t have to start from scratch and that these are now resources for them to use.”

This point resonated with senior Mercedes Ruiz. A drama theatre studies and arts administration double major herself, she was thrilled to see other queer artists doing the work she wanted to do.

“I went to this event because I’m a queer artist,” Ruiz said. “I was interested to meet other queer artists who were in the professional world and see what they’re up to these days, and how I can get from where I am to where they are now.”

Ruiz encouraged those who don’t identify as queer or aren’t involved with theater to attend the workshops as well.

“It really revealed a lot about the norms that we have in society and that can be applied to any area of expertise, whether it be in the business world, whether it be in the medical field, whether it be in the arts world,” Ruiz said. “The themes that were present in the presentation can be applied across all of those fields.”

Overall, Morrill aims to see these workshop practices implemented within theater spaces at Elon to give students a chance to find a community before they leave college.

“It’s not that change isn’t happening,” Morrill said. “It’s now that, okay, let’s look at the student body we have now. What do they need? How can we change it for them? And so I think that’s what this workshop series might help inspire.”

For more details about “Queering the Stage,” visit Jack-Morrill’s Instagram account “queering.the.stage” or an RSVP link for the next two workshops and details about the speakers for each. They will be hosted on Feb. 18 from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. and Feb. 25 from 2 to 3 p.m.
**The Love Affair that sparked Rumours**

When Fleetwood Mac met the couple Lindsey Buckingham and Stevie Nicks, it wasn’t long before their relationship was on the way to becoming the official band of Fleetwood Mac. The album that they released soon after, “Rumours,” is hailed as an iconic album featuring classics such as “Dreams,” “Go Your Own Way” and “Don’t Stop.” It’s not hard to recognize why this album is remembered as one of the others, but goodies, however, I think most people forget the roots of this album. This was the first album that displayed, front and center, the tragic breakup of Buckingham and Nicks. Both artists bled much of their pain emotions and feelings of heartbreak into the carefully crafted songs we enjoy to this day.

The phrase “content is key” heavily applies to music and the artists behind them.

We see examples of this raw emotion in the song “Secondhand News”, which is sung by Buckingham. The song carries a happy, upbeat vibe in the sound and music alone, but simultaneously carries a hidden emotional pain. The lyrics indicate to us that even though Nicks has moved on, Buckingham hasn’t. Funny enough, this message is directly contratd later on in the album by another song, also written by Buckingham. His message then shifts to showing Nicks the man she is currently missing out on post-breakup. Examining Nicks’ role in the album, and breakup, is crucial as well as it gives us insight into how Nicks perceived the relationship.

In the eyes it was a toxic, obsessive romance that she was desperately trying to escape. To Nicks, Buckingham became jaded and focused solely on fame and music, in that order. This forces Nicks of the question whether Buckingham was only able to love her during the highs of the relationship and for future events that will be open to women in STEM and anyone else interested. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, WISE –US has been meeting with speakers virtually. Therefore, allowing students to interact with women in the STEM field outside of a classroom, to gain knowledge and advice on resume tips, internships and what the field looks like professionally.

Personally, I like hearing from Elon alumni,” Nicks said. She stated that WISE has allowed for the increase of visibility and access to what the STEM community looks like. Through this student organization not only has Sheinberg viewed how the world works outside of Elon, but she has met friends involved within and outside STEM fields. “It is meant for anyone who identifies as an ally for women in STEM” WISE hopes to demonstrate what being in a STEM field looks like through the speakers they have hosted. Rizzuto expressed his support for campus-wide involvement to highlight the female experience in a male-dominated field. “Everybody makes more progress if everyone is involved in the conversation,” Rizzuto said. Students can get involved by joining WISE through Phoenix Connect or following their Instagram page @elon_wise to stay updated on any upcoming events.

**Women in STEM: Elon aiming to connect women from the STEM fields**

Elon student organization aims to provide mentors and leadership examples to women in STEM fields

Alexandra Borda

**Women in STEM: Elon – a student organization formed early last spring, provides a community of individuals who aspire to support women in all disciplines within the science, technology, engineering and math fields, according to their president Anna Sheinberg.**

WISE is a student organization open to women in STEM along with individuals who are interested and support STEM. The executive board of the group aims at campus involvement to not only to network but understand how the world works. WISE advises and assists professor of chemistry Anthony Rizzuto specifically focuses on supporting women by providing them with a tangible skill set to assist them in their future endeavors. Rizzuto wanted to guide and mentor a group of women in STEM, who in turn would mentor younger women as well.

“The goal is to support the women and to provide mentors and leadership examples in STEM. There are groups dedicated on campus to supporting people wanting to go into healthcare. That is not the focus of this group,” Rizzuto said. “This is specifically trying to go into science technology, engineering and math.”

In the past, speakers have virtually met with members of WISE to speak about their experiences as a woman in STEM or at Elon. Emily Adams ‘11, who has a job with NASA and uses satellite imagery to analyze Earth, was a recent speaker. During the event, Adams mainly spoke about how she felt supported as a woman in STEM at Elon and how, in her master’s program, where nearly all the people in her labs were men, she was invited when people took credit for her work.

Sheinberg said she’s excited about how this club at Elon has been able to empower women in STEM.

**WE ARE A FEMALE-DOMINATED SCHOOL THAT TRANSLATES TO OUR STEM DEPARTMENTS WHICH IS AWESOME.**

Anna Sheinberg
WISE President

**WIS:E president emphasizes the importance of integrating women into STEM fields.**

**WISE:E PRESIDENT**
**ANNA SHEINBERG**
**WISE:President**

**TRANSLATES TO OUR STEM DOMINATED SCHOOL THAT WE ARE A FEMALE-**

**E ORGANIZATION FORMED EARLY LAST SPRING, PROVIDES A COMMUNITY OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ASPIRE TO SUPPORT WOMEN IN ALL DISCIPLINES WITHIN THE SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATH FIELDS, ACCORDING TO THEIR PRESIDENT ANNA SHEINBERG.**

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WISE:E President
**ANNA SHEINBERG**

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The album cover of Fleetwood Mac’s ‘Rumours’.
The Phoenix are looking to build off of last season and continue to improve. Last season ended in disappointment for the Elon men’s baseball team with a tough loss to the College of Charleston in May. The Phoenix finished with an overall record of 22-22 last season, finishing second in the South division with a divisional record of 10-8 in the Colonial Athletic Association.

The baseball team looks to build on last season’s tough ending with a strong season and post-season push this spring. When asked about his expectations for the upcoming season, head coach Mike Kennedy said how important improvement in pitching was for the team with only a few short weeks until the season begins. "The main thing we’re trying to do now revolves around pitching and pitching and trying to get pitch counts up," Kennedy said. "We’re trying to be consistent with our pitching staff and trying to get pitch counts up so where guys we think are potential starters for us can get their pitch count up to a number that gives them a chance to go five, maybe six innings."

Like most other sports at Elon in 2022, COVID-19 continues to be a hindrance in how the team prepares and performs. When asked about his impact on the team’s offseason preparation and practices, Kennedy said the team was fortunate enough to not have many problems regarding COVID-19 in their preparation for the season. "We haven’t had too many issues, we’ve had a few guys test positive in the past — nothing as of lately," Kennedy said. "I think we’ve been fortunate with guys having the booster which has made it easier but we haven’t had any issues since coming back.”

One of the big names from last season was sophomore first baseman Cole Reynolds, who had a spectacular freshman season last spring — starting 41 of 43 games while batting .362 with an on-base percentage of .398 and totalling five home runs. Reynolds is still early in his career and does not seem to be slowing down anytime soon. Kennedy mentioned how much he has continued to improve over the offseason. "He’s a terrific first baseman with a good feel for the strike zone," Kennedy said. "It was a goal of ours this season to cut down his strikeouts and he’s doing that. As a result he’s definitely getting more hits in our inner squads and we need him there’s no question, he knows that.

Zeno said being a gay, Black dancer is hard, and he still struggles to find reassurance in himself and his abilities. He said though he has always felt safe in his identity and is proud of who he is, he struggles with being typecast in shows. But since coming to Elon in pursuit of his dreams of theater and dance, he has been embraced for who he is. "Being part of the dance team has opened up a new climate where it doesn’t feel as much as if, like, I should be scared for the way I am and what I look like," Zeno said.

Zeno recognized fellow Flame Nyla Rivers as a source of inspiration and support. Rivers, the only other member of color, acknowledged Zeno’s effect on the team. She explained that he has acted as a sense of comfort and light to not only herself, but every other member of the team. "Cullen is realizing his talent and ability a little more," Rivers said. "I think that adding this extra group of people to let him know how amazing he really is, has helped him come into that excellence." Zeno explained he has found a home on campus and friends will keep for a lifetime. The bond between the team has increased dramatically, one he never experienced on any other team. Zeno thinks of joining as gaining acceptance, but also gaining 17 new sisters. "I actually tell them all the time that I feel like they’re my sisters," Zeno said. "I haven’t really been part of a team where I felt that I was connected in that way with every single person.

Prior to auditioning, Zeno was hesitant. He had concerns about how he would interact with and relate to a female dominated team. Zeno believes the stereotype that dance is a female sport causes men to disrespect the work of the athletes. He said the disregard is frustrating, but fortunately he has not fallen victim to ridicule. His initial worries were put at ease when he was quickly welcomed with open arms. Head coach Elly Dirks acknowledged Zeno’s move to join the team was bold, but a long time coming. "We just see him as a teammate at the end of the day," Dirks said. "I think that he started something that opened a lot of people’s eyes. Anybody can try out for the dance team, and we accept everyone.”

Zeno said he views his decision to pursue his passion as providing closure to his younger self. He now calls himself a dancer with pride — a dream he long believed was out of reach that now serves as a creative outlet for introspection. "Dance has allowed me to have a gateway to express how I feel when I can’t speak it anymore," Zeno said. "If I’m having a bad day or I’m really trying to get through something, I’ll just go dance. Dance is an escape from reality.

Elon University red shirt sophomore Trevor Kirk throws a short bullpen on Feb. 10, as Phoenix pitching coach Jerry Oakes and the rest of the Elon baseball team watch on at Latham Park.}

SPORTS
FROM DREAMER TO DANCER

Cullen Zeno reflects on his decision to become the sole male member of the Elon University dance team

Hope Valenti

As the buzzer sounds and halftime begins, the Elon University Flames take the floor and start the myriad of traditions and ponytails, one individual stands out from the rest — Cullen Zeno. As a child in Lafayette, Louisiana, Zeno realized his dreams of dancing at a young age when he began watching musicals. The attraction and awe, he said, was instant. “I was watching a movie and there was dancing,” Zeno said. “I like, I need to do this. I need to dance in a movie.”

Zeno’s obsession with dancing was evident to his parents, leading them to send him to J. Wallace James Elementary Arts & Technology Academy. He continued on to the university level, wandering through middle and high school. In the sixth grade, he tried out for the dance team. As the only boy who auditioned, he said the rejection was devastating. It had a long lasting negative impact on his self confidence on and off the dance floor.

His dancing career was put on a pause, and Zeno turned to cheer. Throughout high school and most of college, he began to believe his dream of a dancing career would never become a reality. And when he accepted a job in college at the University of Louisiana, he continued cheering.

The fantasies of being the performers he saw on television, at a young age lingered. On a whim, he decided to pursue a musical theater degree. After he rejected the top colleges for the theatre in the nation, he stumbled upon Elon University.

“Even in my first year and my sophomore year, I didn’t classify myself as a dancer,” Zeno said. “It wasn’t until TikTok happened, and I started making TikTok dances and getting good feedback that I kind of started to believe in myself. Junior year is when I was like, ‘That’s what I’m going to do’.”

Zeno now has more than 5,000 followers, creating a variety of content including dance videos that have generated over 200,000 likes. Since coming to Elon as a musical theater major, his passion for dance has grown enormously. Now as a senior, Zeno has big aspirations for the future. He hopes to pursue a Broadway career and let his dream live on in the big city.

“It was for the team with only a few short weeks against the Fairfield Stags. When asked about his expectations for the upcoming match up, Kennedy said it will be a good test for the team to start the season. “They will be motivated to make last year not appear to be a fluke,” Kennedy said. “They’ll be ready to play so we’ve got to match up well with them. I’ll be a good test right out the gate for us.”

Elon is set to play Fairfield on Feb. 18 at 4 p.m. at Latham Park to start out the new season.

SPORTS
FROM DREAMER TO DANCER

Cullen Zeno reflects on his decision to become the sole male member of the Elon University dance team

Hope Valenti

As the buzzer sounds and halftime begins, the Elon University Flames take the floor and start the myriad of traditions and ponytails, one individual stands out from the rest — Cullen Zeno. As a child in Lafayette, Louisiana, Zeno realized his dreams of dancing at a young age when he began watching musicals. The attraction and awe, he said, was instant. “I was watching a movie and there was dancing,” Zeno said. “I like, I need to do this. I need to dance in a movie.”

Zeno’s obsession with dancing was evident to his parents, leading them to send him to J. Wallace James Elementary Arts & Technology Academy. He continued on to the university level, wandering through middle and high school. In the sixth grade, he tried out for the dance team. As the only boy who auditioned, he said the rejection was devastating. It had a long lasting negative impact on his self confidence on and off the dance floor.

His dancing career was put on a pause, and Zeno turned to cheer. Throughout high school and most of college, he began to believe his dream of a dancing career would never become a reality. And when he accepted a job in college at the University of Louisiana, he continued cheering.

The fantasies of being the performers he saw on television, at a young age lingered. On a whim, he decided to pursue a musical theater degree. After he rejected the top colleges for the theatre in the nation, he stumbled upon Elon University.

“Even in my first year and my sophomore year, I didn’t classify myself as a dancer,” Zeno said. “It wasn’t until TikTok happened, and I started making TikTok dances and getting good feedback that I kind of started to believe in myself. Junior year is when I was like, ‘That’s what I’m going to do’.”

Zeno now has more than 5,000 followers, creating a variety of content including dance videos that have generated over 200,000 likes. Since coming to Elon as a musical theater major, his passion for dance has grown enormously. Now as a senior, Zeno has big aspirations for the future. He hopes to pursue a Broadway career and let his dream live on in the big city.

“It was for the team with only a few short weeks against the Fairfield Stags. When asked about his expectations for the upcoming match up, Kennedy said it will be a good test for the team to start the season. “They will be motivated to make last year not appear to be a fluke,” Kennedy said. “They’ll be ready to play so we’ve got to match up well with them. I’ll be a good test right out the gate for us.”

Elon is set to play Fairfield on Feb. 18 at 4 p.m. at Latham Park to start out the new season.