

THURSDAY, JUNE 29, 2023
ELON, NORTH CAROLINA

Elon deploys license plate readers on campus

Elon police address and reassure campus residents' concerns about new technology

Elle Simonsen, Lauren McCowan & Zebasil Ayalew
EJP.NEWS

License plate readers have recently been installed on Elon University's campus and are raising privacy concerns. Campus Police signed a contract for a one-year agreement and since then have positioned a total of eight cameras across campus.

The cameras have been used thus far for campus surveillance purposes as well as



Joe LeMire
Chief of Campus
Safety & Police

working to protect the surrounding counties. The cameras have the ability to take a photo of each license plate that enters campus, then the thousands of images they receive each day are kept in a database for up to 30 days. Although, the database is not open to the public. "Only the police department has access because on the back side of it we also have a connection to the National Crime Information Center," said Chief of Police Joe LeMire. "So stolen vehicles, Amber Alerts, things like that, we can get alerts from through these cameras."

LeMire said officers have to enter

their badge number and provide a reason why they need the photo in order to get further into an investigation or exchange information with other counties.

Elon University police officers do not look at every car, only cars that have a criminal history. If a car enters campus that is associated with past criminal history, an alert is sent out to the police officers so they are easily notified of where and when it entered campus.

On the database, officers are able to sort through cars and narrow it down to the details and model of the car they are looking for. License plate readers are different from red light cameras or NC Quick Pass in the way that license plate readers cannot access all of a person's information as soon as it's scanned.

"Ours is not designed to take any action against anybody," LeMire said.

But LeMire said it's important for police not to rely solely on license plate readers because technology can make mistakes. Because of this, LeMire said officers cannot use a photo alone for an investigation but instead, "use it as a piece of the pie but make sure you develop your own probable cause in order to stop the vehicle."

LeMire recognizes concerns about invasion of privacy, saying people are surrounded with so much technology, cameras and upcoming AI software in reality, he said, society generations are used to being watch

LeMire said that he could see students becoming more comfortable with the idea of knowing that their personal information isn't being taken automatically, but only dug through if necessary.



ELLE SIMONSEN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

License plate cameras, like the one shown here, have been placed across Elon University to take photos of every plate that enters campus.

Sgt. Richard Hooks, also from Elon University Police, said officers already have guidance from courts about the use of license plate data.

"It's already out in the open and it's already information that the government has, so running those things doesn't require any burden of proof or reasonable suspicion," Hooks said. "They're out in the public, so there's no privacy interest per se."

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THEY'RE OUT IN THE PUBLIC, SO THERE'S NO PRIVACY INTEREST, PER SE.

SGT. RICHARD HOOKS
ELON UNIVERSITY POLICE

North Carolina General Assembly makes changes to bill that would address mental health curriculum in schools

State Rep. Reneé Price says teachers may need additional training to help students who face trauma

Megan Walsh, Zebasil Ayalew & Miles Hayter
EJP.NEWS

The North Carolina General Assembly passed legislation by unanimous vote that would put a greater focus on mental health-related education for students in grades K-12.

Rep. Renée Price, who is one of 14 co-sponsors of the bill, said in a press conference on June 22 that House Bill 253 was designed to address the complex challenges facing students today.

"Even though I have no children, never had children or grandchildren, it's hard to escape what is happening in our schools," Price said. "So I just feel this responsibility for it, really, for all adults to be aware of what's happening with our students, with our children."



MEGAN WALSH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Rep. Renée Price discusses the legislation that would tackle bullying, sex trafficking and suicide prevention.

The bill, whose primary sponsor is Rep. Ashton Clemmons (D-Guilford), requires schools to implement three main sections. The first section focuses on bullying and building strong character traits such as responsibility. This section also includes instruction for students focused on fostering a community

of respect for school officials, property and other students.

The second section focuses on sexual abuse and sex trafficking training for staff members. Specifically, the training is being led by local law enforcement or nonprofit organizations.

"An English teacher may know a lot about Dickens, and

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SO I JUST FEEL THIS RESPONSIBILITY ... FOR ALL ADULTS TO BE AWARE OF WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH OUR STUDENTS, WITH OUR CHILDREN.

REP. RENEE PRICE
D-ORANGE, CASWELL COUNTIES

Maya Angelou, and all of that, yet can they effectively teach about bullying or harassment?" Price said. "Hopefully, we can get more teachers that actually have the credentials to do the counseling that is needed."

The final section adds lessons on suicide prevention, abuse and neglect to health class curricula. Nonprofit organizations or teachers provide this information to students in "age appropriate" ways. Price said she hopes that these conversations will extend beyond the classroom.

"It's more than just walking into a classroom, learning about something, and walking away," Price said. "This has to be ongoing, where you learn something, there's counseling, maybe we have, you know, discussion groups, you know, or affinity groups."

Exactly how the bill will be implemented will be decided by the North Carolina Department of Education and will begin with the start of the 2023-2024 school year.

"I see safety for our students, I see more care given to children in our K-12 and better outcomes in terms of their education," Price said. "If you're able to deal with the traumas you're experiencing, or if you're able to with life a bit little better than better outcomes, we hopefully will get to see you graduate from high school or a career."



Elon professor brings mixed reality to the classroom

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Student recycling project wins Elon Innovation Challenge

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Grasshoppers' manager and player reflect on careers

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TikTok Amplifies Anti-Fat Attitudes

TikTok users and researchers express concerns over the perpetuation of hazardous beauty and body standards



BRETT GERMANI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Researchers at Elon University have found that content promoting certain body types has a disproportionate impact on girls and women.

Teens and psychologists discuss the ways in which social media impacts young adults' perceptions of themselves and the reflective insight it gives to cultural beliefs.

Connor Skinner, Brett Germani & Brianna Bressan
EJP NEWS

In an age of rapid connectivity, a range of diverse voices and bodies are a scroll away. With so much access to one another, and with such a wide collection of stories at our fingertips, content that upholds inequitable standards of beauty are not only amplified but upheld by social platforms like TikTok.

Indigo Schlee, a recent high school graduate, said that she uses TikTok for lighthearted entertainment. She posts passively for an intended audience of friends and acquaintances, but her curated page easily attracted sour messaging.

"There was at one point where I saw there was a coquette trend that was very toxic, that had a lot of diet culture mixed into it and a lot of bullying also mixed into it and hints of racism in it too, that I thought was really toxic," Schlee said.

The flood of content was so persistent that she found herself hitting "not interested" on videos of girls who posed their bodies in ways to exemplify their thinness.

Schlee began to notice trends like "what I eat in a day" and creators body-checking themselves. Schlee expressed concern that this easily accessible content only further propagated a culture of exclusion and insecurity, especially for those with bodies outside of conventional norms.

Ronnie Young, who uses they/he pronouns, is a 17-year-old cosplayer who has been on the app since 2018. When they post content, deriding comments never seem to trail far behind.

"I cosplay characters, and me being plus size and on camera myself, I'll get comments being, like, that character weight is not like

that, or a character's chin is not supposed to look like that because I have a double chin," they said. "And they'll just say that and I'll be like, ok. Just delete the video now and feel horrible myself the whole entire night."

For teens and young adults like Young, it feels like the hate comes from all sides of a tangled mess of algorithms, dog pilling and platformed self-harm. However, the blame can't solely be placed on the platform; voices of hate and body-shaming can also derive from a system of broader societal beliefs.

"In society, you'll see, the perfect girl is like skinny blue eyes, blonde hair," said Young, "If they see someone different from that, they'll see it as sort of like almost a threat, almost like it's going to be hurting them when in reality it's not."

When discussing who's the most vulnerable to this type of content, Schlee described navigating a world as a younger girl that enforces rigid expectations for how women should look.

"That's a time of your life where you're figuring out that, oh, this is what all the cool girls are wearing, and, oh, this is what everyone doesn't like right now. Or, this is when you're figuring out that in societal standards, fat is not good on women," Schlee said. "And it becomes this whole, like, where do I go from here to figure out how to get more like this girl?"

Ilyssa Salomon, an Elon professor who specializes in experimental psychology, agrees.

"That's largely cultural, cultural in the sense that we place a greater emphasis on the importance of attractiveness among women compared to men," Salomon said. "It's more important sort of in the patriarchal society that we exist in for women to be attracted to be sexy and be sort of succeeding at being sexual objects or being attractive."

Another researcher, Courtney Abruzzo, who is a rising senior and psychology major at Elon, discussed an emerging pattern of disproportionate impact on girls and women.

"We've actually been looking a little bit at gender typicality. And kind of how it differs. And from what we've read, and kind of

seen in our results a little bit is that we definitely seen that girls struggle with it more than boys do. But there's still an impact on weight content that kind of affects all genders," Abruzzo said.

The race for validation in a culture that touts a certain physicality as the pinnacle of beauty leaves teens vulnerable to slipping into spirals that scar their perception and apply pressure to conform, even at the cost of their health.

"I know that if I was looking at videos that were specifically catered more towards diet culture and body checking in past years, it would. It would have been something that I probably would have been quite vulnerable to following and or abiding by," Schlee said.

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IN TIMES THAT BECOME REALLY HARD, REMEMBERING THAT IT'S SO SPECIAL TO BE UNIQUE AND IT'S SPECIAL TO BE SO UNIQUELY BEAUTIFUL IN A TIME WHEN EVERYONE IS WANTING EVERYONE TO BE CARBON COPIES. IT'S VERY BEAUTIFUL TO BE A UNIQUE PERSON.

INDIGO SCHLEE
STUDENT

In her thesis and dissertation, Salomon concentrated on the impacts that social media had on adolescent body image and delved into the potential risks of eating disorder development as well. Her expertise has inspired research on the widely untraversed ground that comes with the undocumented long-term impact of social media on body image.

Social comparison, a theory that describes the process in which we reexamine our perceptions through the influence of others, has been around long before social media. From celebrities in the 1990s to influencers of the 2020s, social comparison has generated a generations-wide beauty standard.

"Is it that social media is transforming our psychology or is it that it's kind of hijacking it?" Salomon said. "Is it taking something like social comparison that's been happening probably forever, but creating really the perfect way to do it?"

When asked about the potential of TikTok as an inclusive platform, Schlee said, "There are amazing communities on TikTok and on Instagram and all these apps, but it just feels like the societal zeitgeist is not going to change. The pressure of the people that they're putting on other people is the real problem. And it's not just strict to each app. It is everywhere. No matter what app you go to."

However, despite all of this, Schlee expresses the hope that our identities can be untethered from the online sphere.

"You're not ball and chain to the app or to people's standards. You are a free thinking human being who can give up and change how you think about yourself and how you think about the apps that you use," Schlee said.

Young suggests that if the internet is breaking you down, it's better to separate yourself from the source of harm.

"I recommend getting off the internet," Young said. "If the internet is affecting you, get off because you'll just be stuck in that constant repeat."

Indigo concluded with a call for kindness and compassion, both toward yourself and others.

Professor and student take mockingbirds under their wing

Dave Gammon and Alayna Thompson enter a new phase of their research on mockingbird song-learning

Kate Gray, Ryan Turner
& Megan Walsh
EJP.NEWS

Researchers Dave Gammon and Alayna Thompson spend almost every day with Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Tiger Woods. These are just some of the names they’ve assigned to the mockingbirds they study, starting at 5:30 a.m.

“We can kind of remember who they are and give them a fun, interesting little name,” Thompson said. “And we come to associate almost a personality with these birds when we get to know them more and more.”

Gammon, a professor of biology, and Thompson, a rising senior studying biology with a specialty in foundations of medical sciences have studied mockingbirds since fall 2022, attempting to discover whether they can learn and mimic unfamiliar sounds. Their research, known as Summer Tweets, entered a new stage last week as they put their experiment out into the field. Summer Tweets features speaker boxes engineered by Thompson to play specially mixed bird sounds at certain intervals throughout the day.



KATE GRAY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Alayna Thompson and Dave Gammon look for spots to place their speaker boxes.

“SO, WOULDN’T IT BE COOL IF WE COULD TEACH AN OLD DOG NEW TRICKS? AND NOBODY’S BEEN GOOD AT THAT IN THE BIRD WORLD.”

DAVE GAMMON
PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY,
ELON UNIVERSITY

“We’re almost trying to simulate new birds coming in. Maybe like a summer migrant or something like that, which is kind of why we call them Summer Tweets,” Thompson said. “And they’re coming in and they’re singing, and the mockingbirds are going to hear that and be like, ‘what’s that

new bird singing?”

Summer Tweets is not Thompson or Gammon’s first time studying mockingbirds. Gammon completed a study in 2020 where he played hours of mockingbird sounds all over campus. None of the birds learned anything. After hearing about this study at a research forum, Thompson theorized that it didn’t work because the birds weren’t in the right mindset for learning:

“For us to learn, we need the right context, right? You’re not going to learn at a party, but you would learn in the classroom. Context matters,” Thompson said. “So, we were thinking maybe for the birds, context also matters.”

Summer Tweets is the third experiment Thompson and Gammon have completed together. If it succeeds it would be groundbreaking for the bird community, since there has never been a successful study for song-learning in mockingbirds.



LOGO DESIGNED BY RICK EARL

Additionally, it could even have possible implications for humans and other animals.

“It’d be really cool to know how old organisms learn new things, right? You think about Alzheimer’s and dementia, I mean it’s really fascinating to know how the brain breaks down,” Gammon said. “So, wouldn’t it be cool if we could teach old dogs new tricks? And nobody’s been good at that in the bird world.”

As for now, the pair has to collect and interpret data based on Summer Tweets.

“If it does work, then we have to think like, which songs did they learn? Did they learn some songs better than others?” Gammon said. “Which of the experiments that we used were right? Which ones were the most effective? So, it’d be really cool to know the fine nuances of how learning takes place when you’re an older organism.”

Going forward, Gammon and Thompson plan to continue their

THIS RESEARCH, IF IT WORKS, IT HOLDS A LOT OF IMPORTANCE WITH IT – ESPECIALLY IN THE BIRD COMMUNITY – AND EVEN BEYOND THAT.

ALAYNA THOMPSON
BIOLOGY MAJOR, ELON
SENIOR

research into the 2023-2024 academic year.

“Dr. Gammon always talks about, ‘Oh, you’re going to be on National Geographic one day,’ you know, I know this research, if it works, it holds a lot of importance with it – especially in the bird community – and even beyond that,” Thompson said



KATE GRAY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A Summer Tweets speaker box placed by Alayna Thompson and Dave Gammon sits next to an intramural soccer field off of South O’Kelley Avenue.



KATE GRAY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Alayna Thompson and Dave Gammon looking through binoculars in the direction of a mockingbird song.

Elon biology professor Dave Gammon taking notes while field researching mockingbird song-learning.



KATE GRAY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



KADEN NZARO | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

La'Tonya Wiley, special events coordinator at the International Civil Rights Center & Museum in Greensboro stands beside a painting of the A&T four who began civil rights sit-in protests at lunch counters in 1960.



MILES HAYTER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Students participating in a basketball camp sit on the sidelines listening to their coach during a scrimmage.



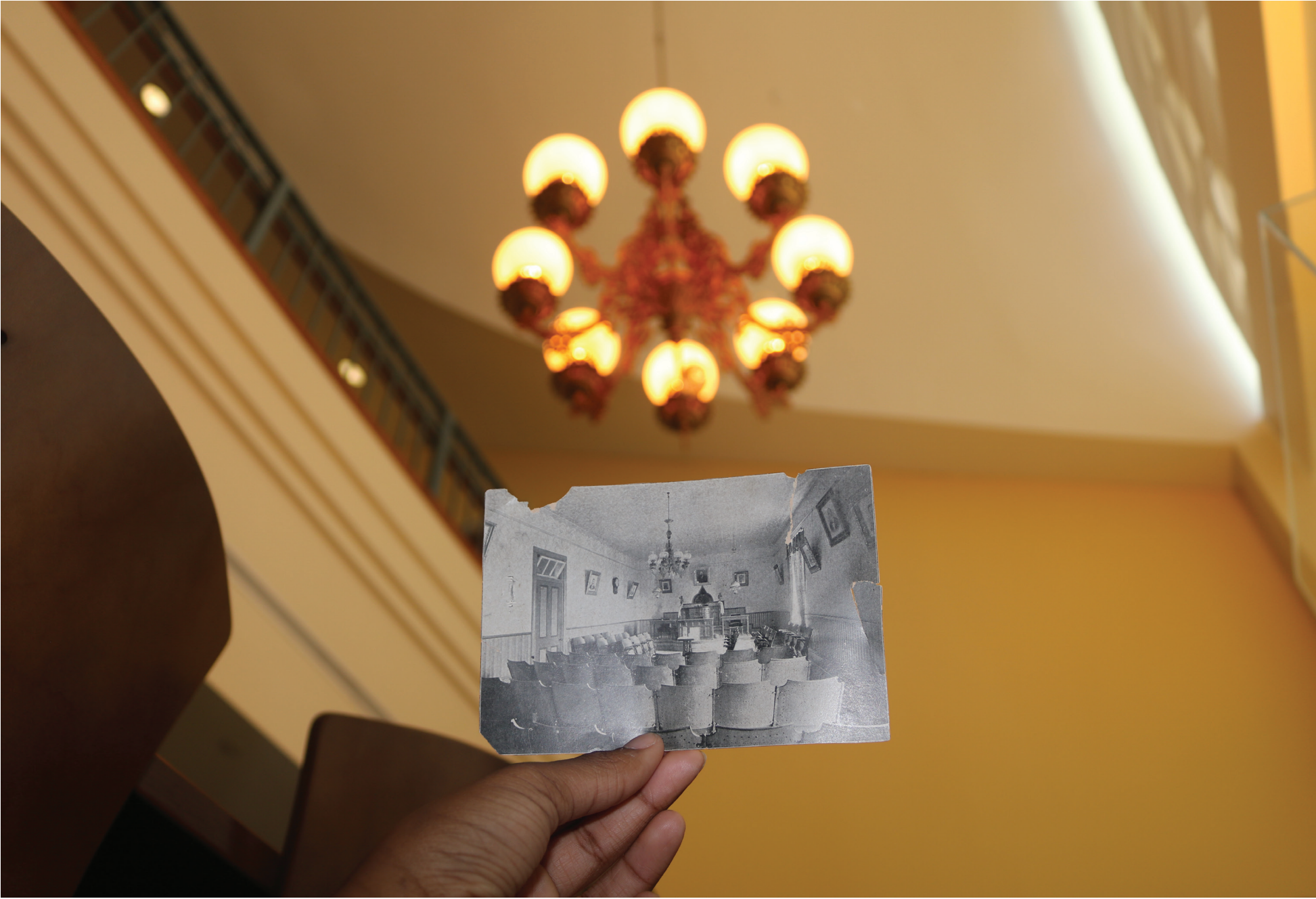
Sgt. Richard Hooks drives around Elon in a police car looking at the newly implemented license plate readers on campus.

LAUREN MCCOWAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Rep. Renee Price gives a press conference about changes being made to North Carolina House Bill 253 that addresses mental health-related education for students in grades K-12.

MEGAN WALSH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



A photo of an old classroom before the fire shows the same chandelier that was recovered and now lives in the Belk Library archives.

LAUREN MCCOWAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

100 YEARS OF GROWTH

Elon reflects on the past and looks to the future a century after a devastating fire

Lauren Alexandria McCowan
EJP.NEWS

After a fire burned down Elon's administration building in 1923, the school's board of trustees committed itself to making a 100-year plan that reflects a mindset of growth and development.

Now, after 100 of inspiration, innovation and ingenuity, Elon University is No. 1 in undergraduate teaching, according to U.S. News & World Report. After the fire, some would have expected the school to close down. But instead, the administration decided to replace that building with five others in its place.

Elon University Provost Rebecca Kohn said the commitment to grow and expand the college is still alive. One of Elon's newest projects, The Integrative Health & Wellness Center, "brings together six different domains of well-being," Kohn said.

HealthEU, Elon's new initiative to implement and integrate a healthy mindset for students, includes the six compartments of a person's wellbeing: community, emotional, financial, physical, purpose and social life. Kohn made it clear that her goal is to innovate and engage with

students all over campus by creating places like the HealthEU building.

"That's really important to me because thinking about health is so important for students, especially because students are facing different kinds of pressures in the world today than they used to and having support in all of those different areas is really critical," Kohn said.

Megan Curling, a 2023 Elon graduate and youth trustee, served on the school's 1923 committee, which was responsible for creating events and memorial celebrations of the fire.

"The committee was charged with looking at the last 100 years, looking at all of the growth we've had, and spending a significant amount of time and effort into recognizing the number of ways Elon had grown since the fire," Curling said.

Curling explained the university's inclusive community and how it helps create comfortable environments for students to spend their time honing their skills and passions. The advancement of the community depends on those in and around it.

"Elon, especially, has placed a really large emphasis on fostering community," Curling said. "That's something that's always been very important but they have continued with traditions and added new things to make sure students feel included and very important."

Curling is one of many

students who have recognized the value of innovation and how inspiring it is to be involved with the future of Elon, even after she has graduated. The past fire requires present changes that involve future leaders — 100 years of transformation, addition and diligence.

"We are in an exciting period at Elon. We are seeing a lot of innovation and growth and I think the next few decades for the school will be very critical," Curling said. "The more innovation we have on campus, the more opportunities we create, the more companies we connect with, the more successful alumni we have, then the more people will want to see Elon grow and that is what's most important."



LAUREN MCCOWAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Above, Elon's "Rising From the Ashes" flag serves as a reminder of where Elon came from and where its headed. Below, a photograph from University Archives shows one of the buildings destroyed by the fire of 1923.



LAUREN MCCOWAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Assistant professor of computer science Pratheep Paranthaman wears a mixed reality headset in a classroom on Elon University's campus.

KENNEDY OWENS | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Professor seeks to improve user gaming experiences through mixed reality research

Ryan Turner, Alexa Umanzor & Kennedy Owens
EJP.NEWS

Pratheep Paranthaman, an assistant professor of computer science and coordinator of the game design minor at Elon University, is venturing into the realm of mixed reality games to examine user experience and interaction patterns.

Mixed reality is a medium in which both real-life and virtual elements are merged to create a more experimental

player experience. Paranthaman's interest in computer science and game design stems from his background in artificial intelligence and serious games.

During his doctoral research, he focused on learning-based games rather than recreational ones, which he referred to as "educational games" created to infiltrate other markets and target a wider variety of demographics outside of the usual.

With a master's degree in artificial intelligence, Paranthaman is familiar with the world of both video games and robotics. He said the reason he went into mixed reality games was because

"Mixed reality expands content beyond screens and brings it to a three-dimensional space, combining the physical and digital

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GAMIFICATION IS APPLIED TO MOTIVATE AND ENGAGE USERS IN VARIOUS ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING FITNESS AND LEARNING.

PRATHEEP PARANTHAMAN
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF
COMPUTER SCIENCE

worlds," he said. "I want to leverage spatial environments and interactions to transform the gaming experiences we're all used to.

He employs gamification in some of his classes to teach concepts like leadership and teamwork.

"My specialty lies in games user research, which investigates player experiences in video games, including the impact on players and their emotions," he said. The goal is to make gameplay experiences better and more engaging for users.

"Serious games are already being used in education, such as language learning apps like Duolingo. Gamification is applied to motivate and engage users in various activities, including fitness and learning."

He spends most of his day teaching classes, including computer science/game design and he also has office hours during which he helps students with projects that are primarily focused on mixed reality, virtual reality and games user research, involving user studies and the enhancement of user experiences in these areas.



KENNEDY OWENS | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Pratheep Paranthaman reflects on his experience with virtual and mixed reality, artificial intelligence and robotics.



KENNEDY OWENS | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

View from the mixed reality headset that the user sees while wearing. There is a mix of both virtual elements mixed with reality.

WASTE REDUCTION IN 3D

Elon student's plastic recycling invention wins top prize in annual Innovation Challenge

Gaby Maldonado, Kennedy Owens & Brianna Bressan
EJP.NEWS

In the rapidly evolving landscape of entrepreneurship, Elon University's annual Innovation Challenge has become a pivotal platform for aspiring inventors to showcase their ideas and create something great. Elon University junior Aaron Satko won the most recent competition with a machine that recycles plastic bottles into filament for 3D printing.

The Elon Innovation Challenge, a competition organized by the Doherty Center for Creativity, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, provides students with an opportunity to identify and develop pioneering solutions to a specific problem. It requires participants to develop ideas that best combat problems at Elon and the real world. As part of this year's challenge, Elon students were encouraged to eliminate waste through the Campus Race to Zero Waste initiative.

Alyssa Martina, the director of the Doherty Center for creativity, innovation & entrepreneurship, created the innovation challenge to contribute to students' knowledge of innovation and teamwork. "What inspired me is just the belief that everybody has the ability to innovate, everybody has the ability to be creative," she said. "We think of certain people being entrepreneurial or creative, we all have that opportunity."

Kim Phipps is the challenge's coordinator and collaborates with a team of faculty staff to devise a problem that needs solving. "We've looked at recycling sustainability. We've looked at mental health. So we've come up with things that need to be addressed, and then it's just mind blowing how the students come up with their ideas,"

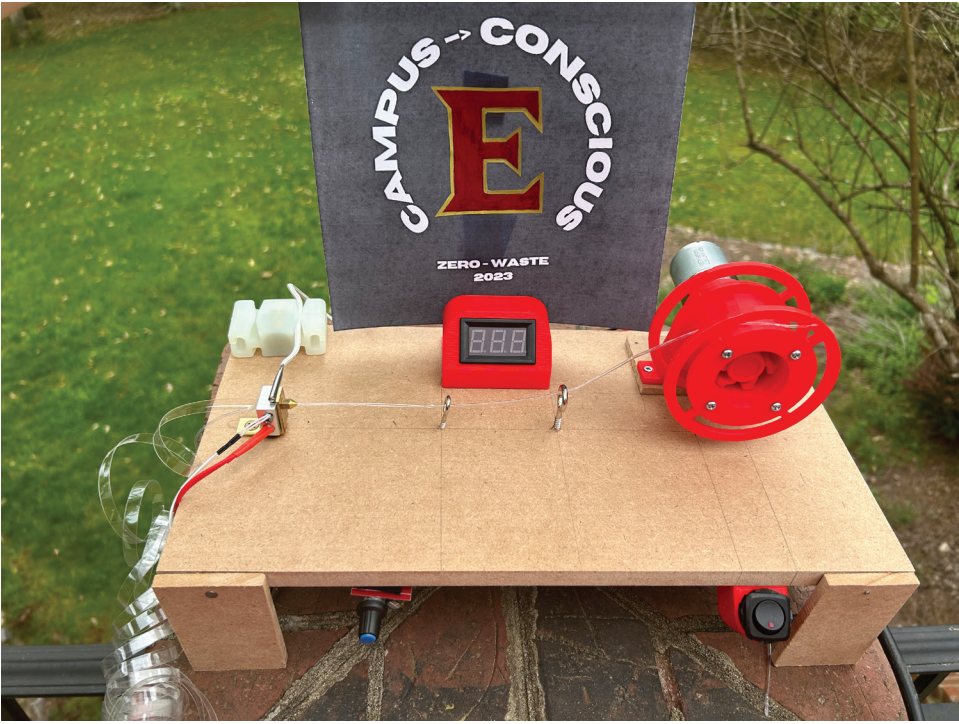


PHOTO COURTESY OF AARON SATKO

Innovation Challenge winner Aaron Satko invented a machine that recycles plastic bottles into a filament that can be used for 3D printing, eliminate waste.

Phipps said. "And some of them are just like, oh my gosh, that is such a great idea and hope that they carry forward with it."

Karl Sienerth, an Elon University professor of chemistry who is a co-chair of the innovation committee, began coordinating with the committee eight years ago when Martina reached out to all department chairs at Elon. "Bringing in ideas, we gather, we kind of brainstorm how we're going to do the challenge this year, what kind of ideas are we going to do, what's going to be the theme of the challenge," Sienerth said.

This year, competitors submitted entries that focused on increasing awareness of recycling, reusing and repurposing. The pitches demonstrated both the achievability of a solution, as well as the challenges' potential for gaining traction in a school community. Moreover, the pitches and prototypes became a model for other students and schools, as other universities also took part in their own innovative competitions.

Satko was the first-place winner of this year's challenge and won the grand prize of \$2,500.

"I pretty much built a machine that kind of refines plastic bottles and cuts the bottles into a small like string, and then it'll flow it through a hot end that melts it into a little filament that can be used for 3D printing," Satko said. "I wanted to win. I mean, if I do something, I'm gonna do it to the best of my ability and I did it with the intention of winning. So I didn't really think I'd win but I thought I'd place at least." The committee was impressed with the ingenuity of Satko's project. "He stood out, the fact that he had an actual working prototype was pretty amazing," Sienerth said.

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WE'VE COME UP WITH THINGS THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED, AND THEN IT'S JUST SO IT'S JUST MIND BLOWING HOW THE STUDENTS COME UP WITH THEIR IDEAS. AND SOME OF THEM ARE JUST LIKE, OH MY GOSH, THAT IS SUCH A GREAT IDEA AND HOPED THAT THEY CARRY FORWARD WITH IT.

KIM PHIPPS
CHALLENGE COORDINATOR

Satko said he plans to participate in the challenge again over his next two years at Elon and recommended students participate in the contest. "For computer science, just build code, just code and make programs. That's the best way to learn," Satko said. "And for the challenge, just be creative. No idea's too stupid. I heard a lot of ideas that I think, 'What's that? That'd never work.' And then people actually got it working. And that's kind of cool to see. It's really just a highlight of my college, this challenge. I just did it to have fun."



GABY MALDONADO | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon University junior Aaron Satko explains the operations of his machine. As part of this year's Innovation Challenge, Elon students were encouraged to eliminate waste.

Researchers explore how grading policies affect sense of student belonging in university settings

Junior Huria Tahiry finds connections between instructors’ policies and problems faced by first-year students

Mekdelawit Gebreslassie, Gaby Maldonado & Kate Gray
EJP.NEWS

Huria Tahiry, a rising sophomore at Elon University, has always wondered how people’s minds work. So the computer science and environmental studies double major decided to research grading systems and the profound impact they have on students’ educational experiences and well-being.

“After the first year (of college), most students change their majors or minor and I was thinking what is the reason behind it and also what impacted that,” she said. “One of the reasons that I found was the belonging and feelings a student has in the class. Then I talked with Dr. (Amanda) Chunco, my supervisor, and started working on the research.”

Tahiry said that students’ sense of belonging in school environments is dependent on their instructors and their classes. This can create problems for first-year students, as they try to navigate what they plan to study while they also adjust to a new environment.

Tahiry conducted a comprehensive survey across five sections of Elon’s Environmental Status intro class, hoping to understand how both students and faculty perceive their classrooms. The questions were divided into three distinct categories: belonging, mindset and self-mindset. Tahiry created separate surveys for faculty and students, and respondents answered 15 questions. The aim was to analyze how STEM majors described their sense of belonging and self-perception.

One of the biggest findings so far corroborates research done on a group of first-graders, in which researchers offered students pieces of chocolate if they completed their work. On the college level, those chocolates become words of encouragement and opportunities to learn and make mistakes. “That was one of the most interesting things that I can understand myself,” she said. “That’s true, as a college student.”



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY BRIANNA BRESSAN

Research being conducted by Elon University student Huria Tahiry has found that instructors with strict grading policies can sometimes be seen as unapproachable by students.

She categorized classes in two ways: professors who focus heavily on grades and professors who focus on individual students’ improvement over time. “I liked both, honestly,” Tahiry said. “Both motivated me to study, but the one that was so strict, I could see not only me but also others got so frustrated.” The experience led many students to avoid the professor and class. But Tahiry has not had a great time in more laid-back classes, either. When attendance and participation aren’t required, fewer students come to class and they exhibit less interest in course material. Tahiry advocates for a middle ground.

“I think if you go in the middle, or balance both of these, it could work,” Tahiry said. Her research has found that the two extremes are not helping students and are leading to feelings of burnout and disinterest in learning. “I had another professor

who had a personal meeting with each student on the first day of the class,” she said. “We talked about not the class, just about ourselves. That made a connection between me and my professor and that was such a close relationship.”

Paul Tongsri, the assistant dean for student success and retention, works with students who need any kind of assistance, whether academic or personal. These two are usually intertwined, as one’s personal life can affect academics and vice versa.

Research has found that faculty members with strict grading scales could seem unapproachable to many students, leading to more stress and affecting the student negatively. Nonetheless, many faculty members are accommodating and willing to work with students to provide them with the support they need, which leads to student trust, comfort and increased academic per-

formance. “There are a number of different factors that go into a student’s sense of belonging. While professors might have a strict grading scale, they might be flexible in other ways,” Tongsri said.

Tongsri recommends consistency. He suggested students ask for help and advocate for themselves. If students feel that they need more guidance or assistance, they can engage with their instructors to understand the resources available to them and help them find a sense of belonging.

And Tahiry said instructors can help nurture students’ engagement to truly create a better learning experience.

“Sometimes the grade is not the only thing, you should make connections with the student,” Tahiry said. “Encourage her or him to be in the class, not just the body or physically, the whole body – I mean the soul – should be in the class.”

Students, teachers gravitate toward alternative teaching methods in evolving school environment

Olivia Woodall, Connor Skinner & Roman Sibaja
EJP.NEWS

In a world undergoing rapid advancement, a consensus among teachers and professors is forming: how students are taught in the classroom needs to grow alongside a diverse student body.

Teachers and students are undergoing an immense amount of change as education, specifically the teaching philosophies of teachers, continues to evolve.

Vanessa Drew-Branch, professor of human services studies and African-American studies, communicates her take on alternative teaching styles rather than traditional ones. “I don’t even love the concept of “neuro-divergent” because what does that mean? What is a neurotypical?” Drew-Branch said. “What I have attempted to do in my class spaces, is to create spaces where all my children could show up and be seen... they can all strut around and demonstrate their learning and their knowledge in different ways.”

After thorough research into high school

students’ standards, there are common misconceptions with expectations that high schoolers should have. While they are preparing to enter the world and become adults, they are still relatively maturing physically and with their mental health.

Ms. Vargas, high school educator at South Bronx High School in New York who declined to give her first name said that schools should be more invested in student’s mental health.

“There is an immense amount of pressure at high school. Pressure to be successful at school, but also have financial pressures. You have peer pressures, personal- self-esteem pressures,” Vargas said. “Developmentally, you are going through so many different things that school can often feel like a mundane task. That is not meeting you where you are, that is not meeting where students are. That’s one of the biggest problems with the education system that is failing to piece together different components of what it takes to be a teenager.”

A growing phenomenon amongst teachers is relationship building with their students.

Margie Wescott, a history teacher at CE Jordan High School, explains how her teaching philosophy benefits her students. “At its core, it’s teaching my kids things that are important and that I know that will make them, I don’t want to say better humans, but more informed humans,” Wescott. “Teaching them that information in a way where I am acknowledging that yes, they are my students, they are coming to me to learn information, but more than that, they are humans. They are teenage humans that kind of have to be here, so I might as well make it worth their while. And I want to appeal to them as people.”

Anonymous Elon Academy student expressed feeling underprepared during their freshman year.

They had not been exposed to the level of pressure maintaining a high GPA would bring. “I remember I was suffering panic attacks and I didn’t really know what they were.” The student said, “After a while, I realized that I wasn’t exercising and I wasn’t sleeping well and I wasn’t really having that face-to-face contact that was needed. So, I was working really hard to keep up and not

having the resources.”

For students who entered high school during the pandemic, pressure to maintain grades while also trying to retain a semblance of normalcy created a precedent of burn out. Traditional grading methods have been shown to negatively impact student mental health, so when teachers veer from heavily grading systems, students feel as though they perform better.

When asked about her alternative grading methods, Drew-Branch said, “I find grading like something that’s definitely a key component to my mental health. Even though grades determine whether you feel really happy or really sad that day, there should be a reconstruction of the person’s perception on what grading is, or what grades are that matter.”

Teachers who implement new methods of teaching have opened up a pathway for reconstruction in an educational system that can be imperfect in practice. As teachers and professors begin to reflect methods of grading, engagement, and test taking, a future of alternative learning seems more attainable than ever.

University internship program hopes to advance local students’ careers

Campus Alamance summer internship opportunity provides opportunities for Elon students

Mekdelawit Gebreslassie, Brett Germani & Alexa Umanzor
EJP.NEWS

Elon’s Campus Alamance summer internship program offers valuable and fitting work experience for students with various majors and focuses. It matches students with compatible internship opportunities that aid their careers and the community at large. The summer program lasts for eight weeks, and the internship can continue into the fall semester if both the student and the employer desire to continue the relationship. Every Tuesday night, the program holds professional development meetings hosted by the Campus Alamance coordinators, where students focus on their beliefs in the workplace, their position in the community and how internships impact what they are doing. Additionally, social gatherings for networking are held so students and employers can meet and get to know one another.

Robin Kazmarek, the director of internships for the Elon University College of Arts and Sciences, oversees Campus Alamance and said it is open to any Elon student. In addition to coordinating the Campus Alamance program, she provides assistance and reviews resumes, as well as connects students with internships that can help them earn academic or experiential learning credit.

Internships allow students to engage in a potential future career, helping them realize their strengths and shortcomings. “They’re thinking long term and their internship is helping them to set up what that next step will be for me after graduation,” Kazmarek said. “And again, being right here locally, there are some benefits to that because they might be able to continue that internship throughout the academic year.”

The application process is simplified by the Elon Job Network, an online resource for posting internships and full-time jobs.

“Postings are put into the Elon Job Network and then students can submit their applications through that portal, which the employers also have access to and all of that is done on a very set timeframe during the middle to the end of the spring semester,” Kazmarek said.

Employers who wish to partner with Campus Alamance must apply and participate in an interview.

We also look at what their staffing structure is because to participate in Campus Alamance, your organization has to have full-time professional staff,” Kazmarek said. “It cannot be a volunteer group or anything like that. So we’re looking at all of those areas and vetting the company to see if it would meet the criteria of our program.”

The benefits that the students see from the internship program



Leah Schwarz, an Elon student who participated the Campus Alamance internship, talks about what’s it like to be part of this internship that involves helping the Alamance County.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

- For organizations to take part in the Campus Alamance program, they must
- submit a program application and be accepted into the Campus Alamance program
 - be located within Alamance County
 - be a nonprofit, government entity, or established business with full-time, professional staff
 - provide an 8-week internship starting June 1, 2023 with 20-30 hours of work per week
 - provide a clear, learning-centered position description that provides educational opportunities as well as project-based work that contributes to the organization in a meaningful way
 - have the capacity to successfully host an intern including: a designated supervisor who is a full-time professional in the field and will take an active role in the day-to-day work of the student intern, an appropriate workspace, necessary equipment and materials for the student intern
 - have a clearly articulated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, engagement in strategies to become more inclusive as an organization, and a commitment to support an intern in transformational, multicultural leadership
 - support the student intern’s involvement in a weekly, professional development training program by allowing them to leave early if needed to accommodate for travel

are endless, such as gaining professional experience and building a network.

“That relationship doesn’t have to end when the internship ends, they can still meet with people in the fall semester, whether it’s their site supervisor or one from another Campus Alamance partner,” Kazmarek said.

These internship opportunities are not only beneficial to students as the employers will have fresh eyes looking at situations to address questions that maybe they’ve been struggling with. Kazmarek said students interested in the program should be communicative and take initiative.



Elon University’s Student Professional Development Center and Kernodle Center for Civic Life launched the Campus Alamance summer internship program in summer 2021.

“One thing would just be keeping on top of email because that’s how we have to communicate with everybody for the program,” she said. “And so sometimes, if students fall back on checking their email, then they may miss an important deadline or a step in the process.”

The benefits of this program are certainly not lost on the students who participate in it.

“Living here, especially

starting school during COVID, I thought it was really important to get more connected,” said Elon senior psychology major Leah Schwarz. “They’ve been good with connecting us to good people and good support systems.”

Because of the proximity and interrelatedness with her psychology major, Schwarz said she finds her internship fulfilling.

“It’s getting to serve a part in the community because Elon is very

sheltered,” she said. “So it’s kind of checking that privilege and going out and doing something good,”

Kazmarek said her favorite aspect of the program has been witnessing the unity it inspires.

“We are helping support our local partners in the community, and knowing that there’s this synergy being built between the university and the community, so our students are coming out with great experiences,” she said.

“

THERE’S A LOT OF MOVIING PIECES AND SO BEING OPEN TO THOSE OPPORTUNITIES, AND NOT BEING JUST KIND OF STUCK IN MY MINDSET OF WHAT IT SHOULD LOOK LIKE, IT WAS SOMETHING REALLY GREAT THAT I LEARNED.

LEAH SCHWARZ
ELON STUDENT



The Greensboro Grasshopper field on a Saturday night. The Grasshoppers face off against the Winston-Salem Dash to a packed crowd.

Sarah Henry Havard, Kaden Nzaro & Roman Sibaja

The sports stadium of your favorite team actually has a drastic impact on the image of the community and local businesses. According to Construction Dive, stadiums like Raymond James and Hard Rock in Miami Gardens, Florida cost over one hundred million dollars to build. Stadiums like Mercedes-Benz cost \$1.6 billion and one of the latest stadiums built in 2020, SoFi stadium, cost nearly \$5.5 billion. Millions of dollars are being poured into developing stadiums for the purpose of gaining profit. The cost of funding and constructing a stadium is not easy nor cheap. Sarah Dawkins, an undergraduate junior researcher at Elon University, spent her summer studying and delving into the impact that newly made buildings for sports establishments have on the economy. Dawkins believes in the near future sports facilities can be used for multiple purposes instead of creating more stadiums and arenas that require a higher de-

mand of finances. “Arenas have more uses and are used for more events, so looking at one example is the Staples Center,” Dawkins said. “It is used for two NBA teams, one hockey team, as well as maybe a women’s team, while a big football stadium may be used for just one football team doesn’t play many teams in a year.” Dawkins explained that new stadiums and facilities are being created for the sole purpose of sports and despite the stadiums having good attention from communities, they also create lasting effects that harm the community. “Building new stadiums actually causes a negative effect around the surrounding area,” Dawkins said. She further explained building new stadiums can also cause both housing displacement and an increasing cost in taxes. While having a successful sports team provides confidence and high self-esteem for communities, it also creates a sense of falsehood and deception. Many fans entangle themselves in the idea that if a major team wins, money is being brought in, and if a team loses, money is being lost because

of its poor performance. “I believe in the positive aspects as part of economic development,” said Tony Weaver, a professor at Elon University in the sports management department and

“THERE’S A THOUGHT THAT WHEN A TEAM WINS, THAT THE CITY OR COMMUNITY IS SUCCESSFUL.”

TONY WEAVER
ASSOCIATE DEAN

also the associate dean of undergraduate student affairs and assessment in the School of Communications. However, he also acknowledges the so-

cial and economic choices that are present when creating million-dollar stadiums in communities that can be personally affected by the expansion and advancement. “I do recognize and understand that if done incorrectly, there could be some negative impacts including examining opportunity costs and how much a facility costs and what it does to the taxpayers,” Weaver said. Despite the potential negative impacts, Weaver believes building stadiums can bring a positive outlook to community fans and support the local economy. “It can affect it positively if you are able to attract visitors, if it allows people who may not have been familiar with your community to bring them into the community, ideally then spending money into the local area,” Weaver said. “You start to see where it’s not always a black-and-white good/bad, it’s kinda the level at what we support it at. So, it doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t support sports, but once it devalues other things in the community some people might say ‘we’ve gone too far,’” Weaver said.

Thank You

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What’s hoppin’ with the Grasshoppers?

Brenden Dixon (5) stands at first base and prepares to run to second as his teammate steps up to the plate on Saturday, June 24. The Greensboro Grasshoppers beat the Winston Salem Dash 12-2.

Manager Robby Hammock and player Brenden Dixon talk about their careers and the Grasshoppers

Sarah Henry Havard, Frasier Horton & Sam Weiss
EJP.NEWS

Robby Hammock, a catcher for the Arizona Diamondbacks, sprung from his crouching position and thrust his fist in the air, ball in hand. It was the end of the ninth inning. Randy Johnson had just recorded the 27th out of his perfect game against the Atlanta Braves on May 18, 2004.

It was moments like that one that made catching so important to him.

“It was something that really drew me to the game,” he said.

After six years in the major leagues during which he hit .254 with 12 home runs with Arizona, Hammock retired as a player but remained in the game. Hammock knew he wanted to coach.

“I want to manage the big boys,” Hammock said.

And he’s done just that. Hammock is now in his first year as manager of the Greensboro Grasshoppers, the single-A affiliate of the Pittsburgh Pirates. Hammock said he treats his players the same, but he may push the catchers a bit more.

“I’m still going to be harder on them but with a greater understanding,” he said.

The competitiveness in the sport along with the numerous pressures of performing well took a toll on Hammock.

“The emotional mental beatings you take with it,” Hammock said “I’ll never forget it.”

“
I WANT TO MANAGE
THE BIG BOYS.

ROBBY HAMMOCK
MANAGER, GREENSBORO
GRASSHOPPERS

In his first season of coaching the Grasshoppers, the team has gone 35-28 and is currently second in the South Atlantic League.

Hammock is not the only first-year Grasshopper. Brenden Dixon, a stand-out infielder and designated hitter, joined the team in May.

“
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BRENDEN DIXON
DESIGNATED HITTER

And he is no stranger to winning. He claimed two titles with Tahquitz High School. Dixon also hit a home run and a double in the Grasshoppers 12-2 win against the Winston-Salem Dash.

Dixon’s career has come full circle. Growing up a fan of players such as Texas Rangers center fielder Josh Hamilton, Dixon now gets to be a player who the next generation of young baseball players can look up to as a role model.

“Everything I’ve done impacts kids,” Dixon said. “As a kid, your dream, I guess, is to always kind of play for the hometown team.”

Although Greensboro is 1,137 miles away from his hometown of Weatherford, Texas, Dixon said Greensboro, “kind of feels like home.”

The town has welcomed him and Hammock into First National Bank Field.

“With a bigger fan base, obviously, you know, you kind of have adrenaline,” Dixon said. “And obviously that makes it easier to play.”



Grasshoppers manager Robby Hammock reminisces on his playing days, when he spent six years as a catcher for the Arizona Diamondbacks. He caught Hall of Fame pitcher Randy Johnson’s perfect game against the Atlanta Braves in 2004.



Greensboro Grasshoppers defeated the Winston Salem Dash 12-2 on June 24.



Elon women’s basketball team mentors young athletes at camp

Players participating in the local high school basketball camp practice shooting skills, as well as ball development and scrimmaging.

MILES HAYTER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Local high school players came to Elon to learn about the game, develop their skills, and grow both on and off the court

Miles Hayter, Frasier Horton & Olivia Woodall
EJP.NEWS

During the summer, college athletes are working out during the summer but Elon’s basketball players facilitate Elon’s basketball camp. Elon women’s basketball players give back to youth. Local high school teams come to Elon to learn and develop both on and off the court.

From June 22-24, middle school and highschool girls basketball players from around North Carolina are given the opportunity to play in the 20 million dollar Schar basketball center complete with a main court and two practice adjoining gyms. The girls support and compete against each other under the instruction of college scouts and Elon athletic faculty. For the first time, they get to tour college campus life from the perspective of a student athlete, as they stay in the dorms and use their locker rooms as well.

Raven Preston, the reigning CAA Freshman of the year, plays a pivotal role in the girls’ progress throughout high school and beyond. As a former camper herself, she brings a seasoned perspective and can relate to the campers.

“My favorite part of camp is meeting new people and coaches, and giving back to the kids,” Preston said. One lesson she learned from her counselors is that despite what happens on the court, you can always control your energy, your effort and your attitude. She also learned the importance of giving back to the community.

Kaila Ealey, director of operations at Elon University athletics, shares her gratitude and pride in the young, aspiring athletes as they showcase their potential, drive and skills that are honed throughout the program. “We are big in creating a great athlete and a great person with some of the skills like time management,” Ealey said.

Aust just graduated from Elon in 2023, but is already the assistant director of athletic communications for Elon and also

plays a crucial part in the camp’s organization. “Girls in the area are excited to have a connection to local basketball and get excited about women’s basketball,” Gray Aust said

Elon also offers a kids camp to give back to the community. The players are responsible for refereeing the scrimmages, coaching the players and managing the clock and score.

“We played Richmond on a Thursday at 11. There were 2,000 kids filling this entire arena lower bowl and it was loud, it was the largest we have ever had for women’s basketball,” Aust said.

“A LOT OF WHAT WE SAW AT THE KID’S CAMP STEMS FROM OUR EDUCATION DAY. WE PLAYED RICHMOND ON A THURSDAY AT 11. THERE WERE 2,000 KIDS FILLING THIS ENTIRE ARENA LOWER BOWL, AND IT WAS LOUD. IT WAS THE LOUDEST WE HAVE EVER HAD FOR WOMEN’S BASKETBALL.

GRAY AUST
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS

The same faculty runs both the girls’ and the boys’ camps with the mission of spreading Elon athletics to the community. “Having the opportunity to come to see women’s basketball and learn about Elon establishes that factor of getting a good education and the end goal of what you can do” Aust said. According to Ealey, regardless of the camp, the objective of creating the next generation of great players and people stays the same; showing the youth of the local community about Elon’s commitment to youth basketball development.



FRASIER HORTON | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Local high school teams participate in a scrimmage in the Maurice J. Koury Practice Facility.



FRASIER HORTON | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Two high school basketball teams stand on the Robertson court in Schar Center.