



Happy Retirement, Don Grady!

Longtime communications educator concludes impactful 35-year career at Elon

For more than three decades, students could easily distinguish **Associate Dean Don Grady's** baritone voice in broadcast news classes, senior capstones and throughout the School of Communications' facilities. Having arrived on campus 15 years before the school was founded, the longtime professor and administrator was pivotal in the development of Elon's nationally renowned communications school. But in December, the one-time broadcaster officially signed off, concluding a career that was synonymous with Elon and excellence.

After befriending **Gerald Gibson** – a future Elon colleague – at North Carolina State University's student radio station in the early 1970s, Grady embarked on a career in radio and television, working for a decade in broadcast news before returning to his alma mater to teach. By 1985, his professional background and meticulous manner were influencing Elon's academic endeavors. He regularly taught broadcast courses and senior capstone classes and, from 1987 to 1993, served as the first chair of the Communications Department. He served again as department chair from 2004 to 2009 and became associate dean in 2010.

Grady helped build the School of Communications brick by brick, said many of his former colleagues. **Dean Rochelle Ford** described Grady as “a leader's leader,” a caring, attentive professor and department chair. She credited his leadership for ensuring the school's smooth transition from two departments to five a few years ago.

“When I became dean, he supported and coached me to be a good leader at Elon,” Ford said. “Don has been a reliable connector and servant leader in developing the School of Communications into what it is today.”

“Don Grady is one of the giants who helped transform Elon into what it is today,” added **Paul Parsons**, the school's founding dean who retired last spring. “During the two decades I worked alongside him, he was central to making the School of Communications great through administrative leadership, national accreditation, his student-centeredness, and being a fount of wisdom and integrity.”

Like many events over the past year, Grady's last meeting with faculty and staff at the school's National Advisory Board gathering in December was held virtually. But that did not stop colleagues and friends from sharing words of thanks, paying homage to the longtime educator's impact.

During one such tribute, one board member recalled how years ago their child, then a student at Elon, was rushed to a Chapel Hill hospital after an injury. The situation was potentially dire. As the board member shared the details, he grew emotional noting how Grady showed up to the hospital on short notice – a testament that his care for students isn't limited to the classroom.

At the same meeting, **Associate Dean Kenn Gaither** provided what is likely the most apt description of Grady and what he has meant to Elon University, to the students and to his colleagues. Gaither noted that Grady was the son of a brickmason contractor who used his hands to build something new – something that would last.

Like his dad, Grady is a builder. “He has used his humanity, work ethic and integrity to help build the School of Communications,” Gaither said.

Story by: Kyra O'Connor

Design by: Liz Romagnoli

Captions 1) To commemorate **Don Grady's** retirement, faculty and staff participated in a surprise parade celebration Dec. 11, driving by the Burlington home Grady shares with his wife, Joan (Photo by **Randy Piland**). 2) Grady works at his desk during the 2001-02 academic year (Photo courtesy of University Communications). 3) After two stints as department chair, Grady became an associate dean in 2010 (Photo courtesy of University Communications). 4) Grady, who was known around campus for his ability to connect and build relationships with colleagues and students, chats with **Professor Naeemah Clark** outside Dwight C. Schar Hall (Photo by **Tommy Kopetskie**). 5) Grady lectures to students on the first day of class in fall 2018 (Photo by Tommy Kopetskie).