



ELON
UNIVERSITY

DIVISION OF
Inclusive Excellence
BLACK LUMEN PROJECT

THE BLACK EXPERIENCE AT ELON

A **BLACK LUMEN**
PROJECT REPORT



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I. CENTERED WITHIN A BOLD STRATEGIC PLAN

Adopted in spring 2020, the Boldly Elon strategic plan aims to expand Elon University's position of national leadership in student success through four themes:



Learn: We will make bold innovations in relationship-driven learning and mentoring; launch a distinctive school of engineering, add nursing programs and advance students' data competency.



Thrive: We will build a healthier and more diverse, equitable and inclusive community, where all students, faculty and staff experience belonging and well-being.



Connect: We will develop lifelong alumni personal and professional learning and networks; will partner with our local communities to enhance education, health and economic development; and will win athletics conference championships and lead our conference in academic performance.



Rise: We will position the university globally, expanding our admissions footprint, raising resources to support increased access and financial aid, and sharply defining international reputation and value.



Professor of Psychology & Director of the Black Lumen Project Buffie Longmire-Avital, right, talks with one of her mentees, Lumen Scholar Eukela Little '22.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

II. EMBRACING BLACK INSTITUTION AT ELON

The simplest definition of “institution” is an organization united by a shared mission. In June 2021, I was appointed as the director of the Black Lumen Project to define, champion and expand Elon University’s Black Institution — **a reflection of synergies among the many spaces, people, programs and initiatives that aim to advance and weave the Black experience into all aspects of university life.**

Among the many recommendations in the [2020 Committee on Elon History and Memory Report](#), which provided the genesis for the Black Lumen Project, was the creation of an “annual report on the Black experience at Elon.”

While there is still much work to be done and more stories to be told, this report aims to celebrate the many milestones and rich contributions Black Institution at Elon has made to the university legacy since the Black Lumen Project was established.

Black students have always been active and exemplary Elon citizens. They have paved the way for collective alumni engagement, sustained affinity networks and giving. The following pages provide a snapshot of how engaged our Black students have been in every aspect of their Elon journey and how that engagement continues well after they graduate.

Black Institution at Elon has always been supported and maintained by dedicated faculty and staff. Commitment to the Elon ideals and strategic vision are on display through faculty and staff mentorship, and innovative teaching. Our Black faculty and staff have built strong communities, striving to center holistic professional and personal development. Creating reflective spaces, such as the professional development session with WellAcademic founder and psychologist Roxanne Donovan, and the space to share collective love and memory for bell hooks, are a few of the activities and programs the Black Lumen Project has sponsored during the past two years to support Elon's Black faculty and staff in their journey.

As you read through this report, I invite you to celebrate these and other accomplishments, which were made possible by collaborative work among many offices and divisions at the university. Additionally, I invite you to wrestle with the stories that have still not been shared and the fact that, while we have advanced forward, we have not yet arrived. This is not a bad thing; this is just motivation to continue deepening the foundation for a richer Black experience and Black Institution in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Buffie Longmire-Avital
Professor of Psychology & Director of the Black Lumen Project

The Black Student Union is among the many programs across campus that focus on the Black student experience.





Photographs celebrating the achievements of Black students and alumni adorn the desk of Marilyn Slade, program assistant in the Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Diversity Education.

III. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following people contributed to the creation of this report under the guidance of **Buffie Longmire-Avital**, Professor of Psychology & Director of the Black Lumen Project:

- **Shaunta Alvarez**, Digital Collections and Systems Librarian and Assistant Librarian
- **Brooke Buffington**, Assistant Vice President for Student Professional Development Center
- **Naeemah Clark**, Professor of Cinema and Television Arts and J. Earl Danieley Distinguished Professor
- **Kimberly Fath**, Associate Director for Assessment
- **Bob Frigo**, Assistant Dean of Campus Life and Director of the Kernodle Center for Civic Life
- **Evan Gatti**, Professor of Art History and Chair of the Committee on Elon History and Memory
- **Eric Hall**, Professor of Exercise Science, Director of Undergraduate Research and Faculty Athletics Representative (2008-2023)
- **Charles Irons**, William J. Story Sr. Professor and Professor of History
- **Allegra Laing**, Executive Director for Global Programming
- **Donell Moore**, Director of Undergraduate Admissions for Diversity and Access
- **Keren Rivas**, Assistant Vice President for Marketing Communications
- **Simone Royal**, Assistant Director of the Center for Race, Ethnicity, & Diversity Education
- **Keshia Wall**, Assistant Professor of Dance and Coordinator of the African & African American Studies Program
- **Randy Williams**, Vice President for Inclusive Excellence and Associate Professor of Education

IV. A BOLD INCLUSIVE PATH FORWARD

INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE AT ELON

Elon University's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion is rooted in its mission, which includes fostering respect for human differences. In 2020 the university took a major step forward in this area by establishing the Division of Inclusive Excellence to create a more diverse, equitable and inclusive campus community.

Elon established the Division to align its efforts with its values toward a more equitable future. While the university had made progress in this area, as demonstrated in the outcomes of the previous strategic plan, there was still significant work to create a university for a multicultural world. The current strategic plan, Boldly Elon, continues this trajectory of creating spaces, experiences and outcomes that reflect well-being and inclusion for a diverse community. Along with the university's need for improvements are opportunities among people and programs achieving success across campus, and the Division of Inclusive Excellence exists to provide leadership and coordination of existing resources while identifying new ones to achieve its vision.

Led by Vice President for Inclusive Excellence Randy Williams, the Division has a core team of leaders focused on academic inclusive excellence, faculty and staff professional development, undergraduate students and graduate and professional students. This leadership team serves as a hub, formally connecting to areas like Academic Affairs, Admissions, Athletics, Human Resources, Student Life and University Communications. To address the needs and challenges, the Division has developed a comprehensive set of programs and initiatives.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Kiara Hunter '23 participated in the Huemanim of People project to highlight how her passion for health equity has been informed by her life experiences. She approaches public health through an anti-racist lens and cares about varied societal issues such as mass incarceration, food insecurity, water sanitation, physical health and immigration. At Elon, she studied why these things happen so frequently in her communities. She also hopes to enact change by adding love to the equation. Hunter is pursuing a master's degree in population health at University College London working toward her long-term goal of becoming a public health analyst.



View her story and more by scanning this QR code or visiting elton.edu/huemanim.



From left: Scenes from the February 2023 Campus Conversation, Black History Month Dance Concert and Black History Month kickoff event.

Programs and initiatives include:

- **Campus Climate Assessment:** The Division partners with the Office of Institutional Research and other departments to administer periodic campus climate surveys to enhance the university’s ongoing understanding of students, faculty and staff experiences related to diversity and inclusion. These survey findings provide valuable insights into the university’s challenges and help guide the Division’s work.
- **Bias Education and Response:** The Office of Inclusive Excellence Education and Development responds to reports of bias and discrimination on campus. Staff provide support to individuals who have experienced identity-based harm, as well as education and training to the broader campus community.
- **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Development:** The Division provides a range of development opportunities for faculty, staff and students on topics that expand perspectives leading to inclusive and equitable experiences and practices. These offerings include workshops, webinars, consultations and other educational programs.

These initiatives, among many others, provide insight into the Division’s work, including focused attention on specific communities’ experiences. The Black Lumen Project, for example, responds to institutional anti-Blackness and aims to define Black Institution — a culturally-relevant concept of connecting African & African American Studies, Black Student Union, Black Employee Resource Group, Elon Black Alumni Network, Black Life Advisory Council and other entities to enhance the Black experience at Elon.

Under the directorship of Buffie Longmire-Avital, the Black Lumen Project stems from the Committee on Elon History and Memory report and is strategically situated in Inclusive Excellence. One of the key strengths of the Division is its focus on collaboration and partnership. Supporting Longmire-Avital’s leadership is one of the ways the Division exemplifies this strength.

V. A SNAPSHOT OF OUR BLACK CAMPUS COMMUNITY

100%

The passage rate for Black graduate students in Elon's Physical Therapy Program

STUDENTS

- As of fall 2022, slightly less than 6% (356) of the undergraduate student body at Elon is Black.
- The top three majors for undergraduate Black students are psychology, finance and cinema & TV arts.
- Eighteen percent of all student-athletes in fall 2022 were Black.
- Black students at Elon come from all over the U.S. The top three home states are North Carolina, Maryland and Georgia — all southern states — which contrasts with the overall Elon University student trends that count North Carolina, Massachusetts and New Jersey as the top home states.
- As of fall 2022, Elon Black undergraduate students had an impressive 92% retention rate from first year to second year. This is the highest retention rate of racial demographic groups, and it is higher than the overall student retention rate of 90%. However, with a 6-year graduation rate of 77% — the lowest in comparison to disaggregated racial group data and the overall Elon rate of 83% — there is still work to be done to increase Black student degree completion.
- Black graduate students make up 12% of the graduate-level student body, with Black students accounting for 14% of all Law students, according to fall 2022 data.
- Black Physical Therapy students have a recent pass rate of 100%, which is not only above the overall program rate of 99% but is comparable if not higher than other racial group performances.



Black graduate students make up 12% of the graduate-level student body at Elon.

Right: Black students are highly invested in every aspect of their Elon education and remain engaged after they graduate. Below: Akilah Weaver '00 serves as president of the Elon Black Alumni Network.



- Two years after graduation, Black Law students in the Class of 2019* have an ultimate pass rate of 81%. This rate is lower than the overall rate of 88% for all Elon Law students and other racial groups in that class. This is an opportunity for advancement.

FACULTY AND STAFF

- Nine percent of the faculty self-identify as Black — the national average at colleges and universities in the U.S. is 6% — and 16% of the staff also identify as Black.

ALUMNI

- Elon's 2,000-plus Black alumni are active and engaged, and their giving rate is considerably higher than the overall alumni giving rate. Elon Black Alumni Network (EBAN) has continued to lead the growth of the Black Alumni Scholarship, which was established in 2007. Since then, alumni and other donors have made contributions totaling \$1 million to the fund, supporting 13 Black students at Elon as they pursue their degrees.

* Under ABA Standards, the ultimate bar passage rate is the rate two years after graduation.

Black students had the highest participation rate in service-learning, and service-learning engagement was their most frequently listed Experiential Learning Requirement.

VI. LEARN

ELON EXPERIENCES

Elon is a national leader for engaged learning. Our students are expected and prepared to tackle multiple opportunities to integrate their learning in the classroom with real-world experiences, and to make deep connections as they develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Known in the higher education field as “high impact practices,” Elon’s curriculum is designed to provide students with ample opportunities to gain rich experience, mentorship and purpose-generating moments. Elon students are required to identify and select two experiences that not only resonate with them but align with their path toward career readiness. The five experiential learning opportunities are: Service Learning, Leadership, Undergraduate Research, Internships and Global Engagement.

- Black undergraduate students participate in all the Elon Experiences.
- Service (89%) and internships (85%) boast the highest levels of engagement by Black students.
- Leadership is also an avenue for experiential learning, with Black students having the highest rate of engagement (68%) in comparison to other racial groups and Elon’s overall participation rate (58%).

SERVICE LEARNING

Community-based learning takes place through reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships with the greater community that are designed to advance the public good. It is an experiential education approach that involves collaborative relationships, guided by the expertise of professors and community-based practitioners, to combine student learning with community needs. The partnerships between Elon and communities engage students with entities such as nonprofit organizations, schools, government agencies or locally owned businesses. Students can earn a Service Experiential Learning Requirement (ELR) by taking a designated Community-Based Learning (formerly Academic Service-Learning) course or by enrolling in a pre-approved service experience mentored by the Kernodle Center for Civic Life. During the academic year 2021-22, 80% of Elon undergraduate students participated in service. The average participation rate for Black students is 89%.

GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

During the 2022-23 academic year, 162 Black students participated in a study away program — with 130 students participating in a Study Abroad program and 32 students participating in a Study USA program. These students studied abroad in more than 23 countries, including Australia, Cambodia, Costa Rica, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, France, Ghana, Greece, India, Ireland, Italy, Morocco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Panama, Peru, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the United Arab



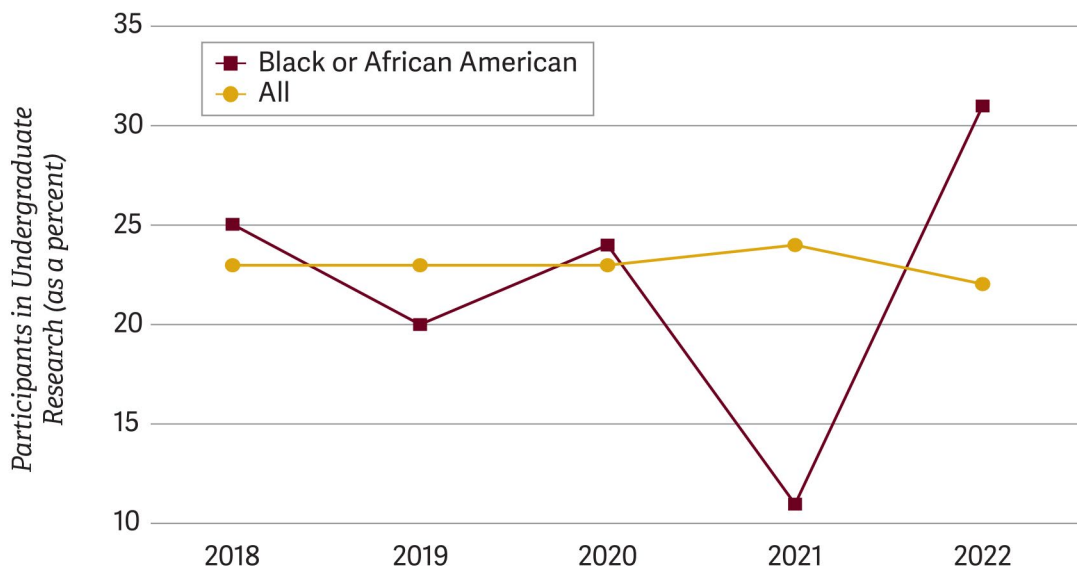
In 2022, 31% of Black students participated in undergraduate research, compared to 22% of the rest of the student body.

Emirates, the United Kingdom and Vietnam. The top five study away destinations include the United States (32 students), Italy (31 students), Costa Rica (14 students), the United Kingdom (12 students) and Greece (9 students). Among locations in the Black Diaspora, seven students studied in the Dominican Republic, six students studied in Ghana and four students studied in South Africa. The most recent global engagement participation rate for Elon students from academic year 2021-22 was 49%. Black students had a participation rate of 41%.

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

The Undergraduate Research Program (URP) at Elon has a strong commitment to increasing access to participation. This is central to Theme 1: LEARN of Elon’s strategic plan — Achieve 100% participation in course-embedded undergraduate research and engage **one-third of undergraduates in one-on-one, deeply mentored undergraduate research.**

To help achieve this goal, the leadership of URP has engaged in conversations with different departments, schools and affinity groups about ways to increase participation. The URP team also participated in the Scholarship and Opportunities Fair for first-year students to help make undergraduate research a more recognizable option to achieve ELR. Below is a snapshot of undergraduate research participation data from the past five years.



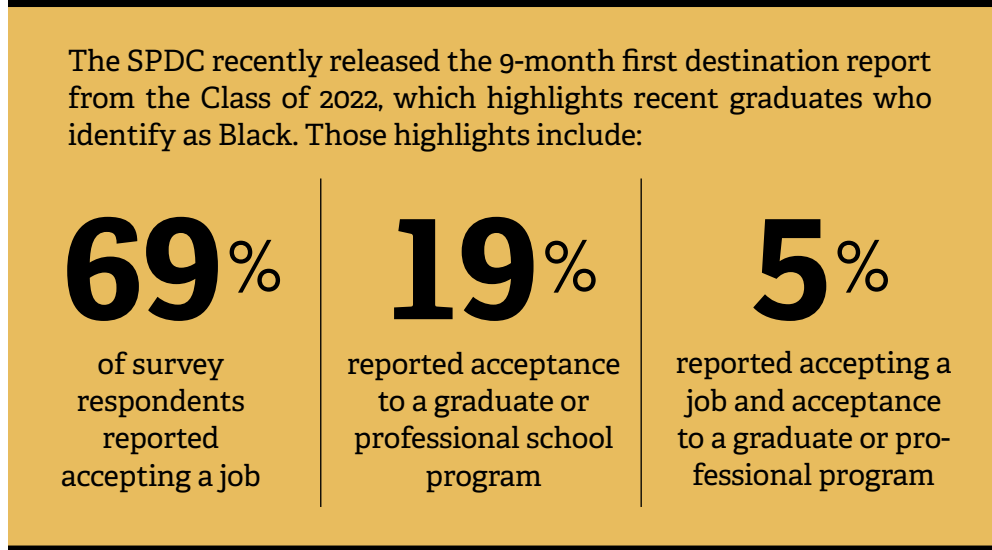
URP is also supporting a special issue of Elon’s Perspectives on Undergraduate Research and Mentoring peer-reviewed online journal on [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Undergraduate Research Mentoring](#), which will come out in fall 2023. This issue is expected to generate ideas that can be adapted by the URP team to help faculty mentor those from different affinity groups.

The high levels of engagement across the five experiential learning opportunities suggest that Black students seize the opportunity to engage in more than just the two required opportunities.

INTERNSHIPS AND NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

The Elon Student Professional Development Center (SPDC) assists students and alumni in understanding their career-related interests, individual preferences, strengths and values. The Center aids students in understanding how to conduct an effective internship, job or graduate program search, for the ultimate purpose of pursuing meaningful careers over a lifetime. Recognizing that Elon University is made up of multiple populations, the SPDC strives to provide as many resources as possible to all students.

In partnership with the Center for Race Ethnicity, and Diversity Education (CREDE) and the Black Lumen Project, the SPDC hosted the Elevate Your Network event focused on connecting Elon’s Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) students with alumni who have successfully navigated life after Elon. This event allows current students to connect with alumni, staff and other university supporters who share identities as they explore careers, prepare for interviews and build professional confidence.



Nearly 93% of the Class of 2022 had accepted jobs or reported acceptance into a graduate school or professional program. This high number is a reflection of many factors, one of which is preparation for their first destination post-graduation. The high levels of engagement across the five experiential learning opportunities suggest that Black students seize the opportunity to engage in more than just the two required opportunities. This pattern of multiple engagement is likely in response to a highly active and driven Black student body as well as an accessibly designed curriculum that is supported by curricular and co-curricular synergies that allow students to balance multiple types of engagements throughout their Elon education. Black students are taking advantage of a curriculum and faculty that prioritizes transformative learning.

FINDING RACIAL EQUITY IN THE CURRICULUM

Naeemah Clark, professor of cinema and television arts and the J. Earl Danieleley Distinguished Professor, led the efforts to develop a sustainable model for curricular advancement on equity concepts. The work was part of her two-year faculty administrative fellow work in the Office of the President. In May 2022, faculty voted for two important additions to the faculty handbook:

New Core Learning Goal

“Equitable Thinking: An understanding of methods to address or remedy injustice and inequality” is now 1 of 8 Core Learning Goals that are a part of the mission of an Elon education.

- In this case, students will learn skills such as empathy and evidence-based problem solving, and practice applying solutions to systemic problems.

Advancing Equity Requirement (AER)

Starting in fall 2023, students will complete a four-credit course designated as Advancing Equity. These courses can be from the students' majors, minors or other Core Curriculum requirements.

- This requirement focuses on systems and structures of racism in a U.S. context.
- These courses will be reviewed by the AER Committee, which will also populate the Diversity Course Database. The committee is chaired by Jessica Carew, the newly appointed Assistant Director of DEI in the Core Curriculum. For a course to be designated as AER, students must:
 - Interrogate their own racial and other identities within cultural institutions and how those structures shape their realities



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Ciani Foy '22 came to Elon set on working in the fashion industry as a graphic designer. Once here, she decided to go out of her comfort zone and test the waters in the world of communications. That's when she was introduced to and fell in love with user experience and user interface.

This newfound passion combined with her long-term interest in fashion motivated her to apply for a user experience internship position with Gap Inc. Before submitting her application, Foy spent time working with a career adviser at the Student Professional Development Center to touch up her resume and interview skills. All of her initiative and hard work paid off and she got the internship, which eventually led to a full-time position after graduation.

“Elon opened me up to thinking big when it came to the career I wanted. I started searching for internships that matched communication design, and other passions of mine, which included fashion,” says Foy. “Ultimately, it was my internship at Gap Inc. that led to the full-time job.”



Top: Naeemah Clark, professor of cinema and television arts, led the efforts to develop a sustainable model for curricular advancement on equity concepts. Below: Keshia Wall, assistant professor of dance, is the new coordinator for the African & African American Studies interdisciplinary minor.



- Explain how the social construction of race and intersectional identities (i.e. gender, class, sexual identity, religion, etc.) are connected to systems and structures of U.S. institutions
- Evaluate the historic, cultural and societal causes of systemic and structural inequity
- Apply real and/or theoretical solutions to systemic racism and other forms of oppression including how historically marginalized groups advocate for self, resist oppression and build solidarity.

ONGOING CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

In summer 2023, 58 faculty will participate in the Advancing Equity Summer Institute as Advancing Equity Scholars. Over the three days of the institute, faculty will develop courses that will serve the AER. As of June 1, 15 courses have already received the AER designation. Several of the courses being worked on during the Institute focus on Black life in the U.S.

During spring 2023, Clark instituted lunchtime “flash sessions” that introduced equity-related topics to campus in 33.3 minutes. In these sessions, colleagues shared hands on tools to understand positionality and identities, defined systemic inequity and offered tips for ways to infuse inclusivity in high impact practices. The most popular sessions featured Human Service Studies faculty members Sandra Reid, Monica Burney and Stephanie Baker defining systemic and structural racism.

Clark also launched the Advancing Equity Leaders program. This program is designed to be a retention, development and mentorship program for faculty with at least four years at Elon. Similar to the Advancing Equity Scholars program, these faculty are compensated for summer work and have funds earmarked for development. Additionally, Margaret Brunson, a professional coach, met with nine senior faculty and staff women of color to provide some career guidance. This session was designed to be a pilot that could be useful for the Office of Leadership and Professional Development as it increases its offerings for underrepresented faculty and staff.

In June 2023, Clark was named the incoming associate provost for academic inclusive excellence.

A NEW ERA OF AFRICAN & AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES LEADERSHIP

In fall 2022, Assistant Professor of Dance Keshia Wall was named the new coordinator of the African & African American Studies interdisciplinary minor. Along with the AAASE Advisory Committee, Wall has successfully cultivated opportunities for faculty, staff and student engagement, and is actively devising strategies to streamline the implementation of new courses within the AAASE program. In preparation for the 30th anniversary of the African & African American Studies minor in 2024-25, a myriad of meticulously planned events, workshops and community engagement initiatives are underway, serving as a testament to the profound breadth, depth and enduring legacy of this remarkable minor.

One of the many complexities of History and Memory work is that stories of celebration often intertwine with stories that call for repentance and reconciliation.

CONTINUOUS ENGAGEMENT WITH ELON BLACK HISTORY

In 1949, W.E.B. Du Bois explained in a [national radio broadcast](#) that Black history was “part of our necessary spiritual equipment for making this country worth living in.” Du Bois also urged Americans to notice one another, to honor Black achievement and to understand the freedom struggle as “a central thread of our history.”

In August 2018, President Connie Ledoux Book announced the launch of the Commemoration Committee, now the Committee on Elon History and Memory, to explore questions related to historical memory and collective identity at Elon University. A [university-wide committee](#) of 12 faculty, staff and students was appointed to carry out the work led by Charles Irons, William J. Story Sr. Professor of History, [joining the ranks of colleges and universities who are revisiting the stories institutions of higher education tell about themselves](#).

One of the many complexities of History and Memory work is that stories of celebration often intertwine with stories that call for repentance and reconciliation. In the context of Elon and American history, it can be hard to talk about Black achievement without acknowledging anti-Black racism.

In October 2020, the Committee published a [report](#) that offered 10 representative episodes from Black history at Elon as “spiritual equipment,” to use Du Bois’s words, to “help make Elon a more just and inclusive place.” The 2020 report also offered 13 recommendations for future work.

Charles Irons, a member of the Committee on Elon History & Memory, led campus tours that explored the history of Elon University’s physical environment through the lens of the 2020 Committee report.



In 2021 a new [committee](#) was seated to encourage broader and deeper conversation about Elon's history and was charged with four tasks:



ENGAGE

1. **ENGAGE:** To facilitate an ongoing conversation about our shared past among students, faculty, staff, alumni and members of the community, including discussion about transitional or challenging moments and the preservation of diverse stories;
2. **INSPIRE:** To encourage through grants and logistical support new, innovative and collaborative projects that call attention to significant elements of Elon's past, prompt continual reflection on our core values and explore the implications for our work in the present;
3. **ADVISE:** To serve as a resource to senior staff and other campus constituencies about ongoing and emergent questions about the institution's history, and to make recommendations about both proposals and priorities to be considered for action; and
4. **SHARE:** To make accessible, to all constituencies and through multiple media, existing and new efforts to tell Elon's story, including student work and other scholarly projects, information about building names, a survey of monuments and other commemorative markers, informal and published histories, etc.



INSPIRE

Led by Professor of Art History Evan Gatti, the committee has completed the following tasks related to its charge:

ENGAGE:

1. Faculty and staff are using the report in the classroom, including Elon 1010: First Year Advising Seminar, COR 1100: The Global Experience, ENG 1100: First-Year Writing, as well as disciplinary courses from a range of programs including African & African American Studies, American Studies, Art History, History, Museum Studies & Public History, Philosophy and Religious Studies, among others.
2. In the Summer of 2022, university administrators met with descendants of Pinkney Comer, an early and especially prominent Black employee of Elon College, who visited campus as they wrestled with Comer's complex legacy. On the one hand, students and faculty at Elon — who at that point all identified as white — were saddened enough at Comer's death in 1920 to commemorate him by naming a new athletic field after him, the first space on campus named in honor of a person. On the other hand, the same people treated Comer like a second-class citizen, even making him the butt of racialized jokes in a 1920 student-run play.
3. In December 2022, the Committee hosted a "Campus Conversation" to discuss next steps for the Committee and especially ways to make its work a whole-community commitment as well as a more sustainable endeavor.



ADVISE



SHARE

INSPIRE:

1. The Committee is seeking more sustainable ways to be involved with the Student Government Association.
2. The group is working on recommendations for more equitable commem-



From left: Tyler McKellar '25 delivering a spoken-word performance during the Black History Month Kickoff event in February 2023; Buffie Longmire-Avital, Sandra Reid and Jessica Carew are among the 9% Black faculty at Elon; descendants of Pinkney Comer, the first person to have an Elon space named in their honor, during their visit to campus.

orative processes to be shared by the end of 2023. These might include adding additional episodes to the series of plaques outside the library, and creating a list of vetted names from the report that can be recommended for a new naming opportunity.

3. The Committee developed a mini-grant program that has supported two students' work on projects related to the report.
4. Conversations with the Gender & LGBTQIA Center, Jewish Studies and the Sklut Hillel Center have begun about ways to use tools and approaches developed for the 2020 report to collaborate in shared efforts to tell more inclusive histories.

ADVISE:

1. Recommendations following national models for best practices for naming and renaming were shared with the Advancement Subcommittee of the Elon University Board of Trustees.
2. Work is underway on a fall 2023 report on ways to sustain the work of engaging the university community in the ongoing commemoration of our institutional history.

SHARE:

1. Copies of the 2020 report were distributed to members of the Elon community who requested them and hard copies are available in the President's, Provost's and Deans' suites, as well as other key locations including the Office of Inclusive Excellence and Admissions.
2. Virtual and [in-person campus tours](#) that focus on episodes from the 2020 report were deployed, centering the Black experience, and especially decades of advocacy among Black students, faculty and staff.
3. Committee members have also presented at the [Universities Studying Slavery Symposium](#) and contributed articles to Today at Elon.

It takes imagination, patience and goodwill to live into this complex heritage redemptively, and Comer's family members brought ideas about how Elon as a community might honor his legacy by attending more

The Black student life experience at Elon continues to evolve to reflect and fit the needs of the current student population.



Dynamic Black student engagement and social agency is on display throughout the campus and the larger community.

closely to the stories of working people. It is a generous impulse, and the sort of idea that, echoing Du Bois, makes this community one worth living in and learning in.

VII. THRIVE

During the 2021-22 academic year, a sample of Elon students were invited to participate in the Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) survey. Seventy-nine Black students participated:

- Elon students strongly endorsed the belief that faculty believed in their potential to succeed academically. However, Black students were slightly less likely to endorse that belief to the same degree as other students. In contrast, while Elon students overall indicated a very strong and clear drive to achieve, the disaggregated data by racial group membership revealed that Black students had the highest levels of endorsement. Black students who completed the DLE survey were more likely to participate in a mentoring program (41%) in comparison to students who identified themselves as part of the other racial groups. Their average participation rate was only 23%.
- For Elon Black undergraduates, promoting racial understanding, influencing political structures (i.e., voting and other forms of civic engagement), working to correct social inequities and participating in community action programs are all significantly important personal values. Elon's Black students are active citizens and community partners with great altruistic commitments. As a group they also had the highest self-assessment of social agency.
- Although dynamic Black student engagement and social agency is on display throughout the campus and the surrounding Alamance County community, Black students still reported a lower sense of belonging in comparison to other Elon students. They reported feeling less safe and perceived less commitment from the institution on issues related to diversity. These findings should be interpreted with an understanding that all Elon students, including Black students, had very positive perceptions of the institution.



DIVING INTO THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

Black student life and experiences

The Black student life experience at Elon continues to evolve to reflect and fit the needs of the current student population. In 2022, Jonathan A. McElderry joined Elon as its new dean of student inclusive excellence. In that role, he is leading student-centered initiatives to achieve the Boldly Elon goals of advancing a more diverse, equitable and inclusive community. That includes overseeing the Center for Race, Ethnicity, and



Clockwise: Simone Royal, assistant director of the CREDE, surrounded by students who participated in the 2023 Black Solidarity Conference; Mari' Robinson '24 is among the 85% of Black students who have engaged in internships; as dean of inclusive excellence, Jonathan McElderry leads student-centered initiatives to advance a more diverse, equitable and inclusive community.

Diversity Education (CREDE), which seeks to meet the needs of the ever-changing student population through advocacy support services and collaborative programmatic initiatives. The Black student community resources span across departmental, academic and social organizations that aim to advise, support and advocate for the best experience for Black students.

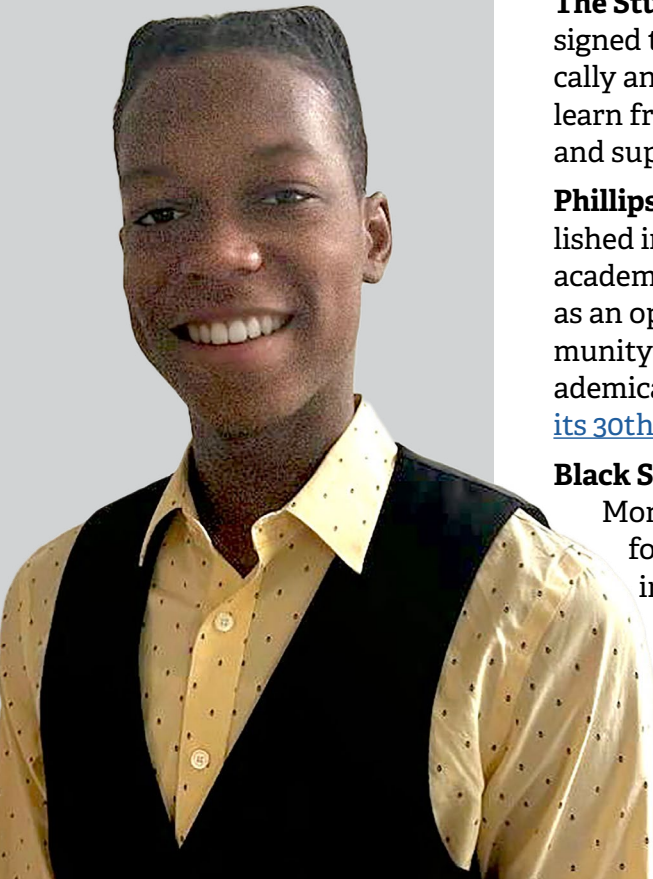
Programmatic initiatives/services across campus that focus on the Black student experience include:

The African Diaspora Living Learning Community (AD LLC) provides students with opportunities to explore African, African American and Black diasporic cultures at Elon and worldwide. The AD LLC is connected to the CREDE and African & African American Studies Program at Elon University (AAASE) to support the in-depth exploration into the rich history and multi-dimensional experience of Blackness. Living in this community allows students to dive deeper into their understanding of Blackness through workshops, projects, mentorship, advocacy and immersive programs.

Black Table Talk is a monthly gathering open to all students with informal discussions around a variety of topics that affect Black students and students of the African Diaspora, both here on campus and in the larger society. These events provide a safe space to learn from one another and

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

A psychology and human service studies double major and an Isabella Cannon Leadership Fellow, **Ethan Lane-Blake '24** has found many opportunities to engage on campus. He is a S.M.A.R.T. mentor, Periclean Scholar and student coordinator with the Center for Race, Ethnicity, Diversity, and Education. He is also a member of the iBELONG Male Mentoring Program, the Sexual Assault and Gender Issues Committee and Student Government Associations' Student Inclusive Campus Committee. The 2023 recipient of the Black Alumni Scholarship, he is completing an independent research tittled, "Erased: The Hidden Stories of Queer People in the Civil Rights Movement."



The BSU aims to cultivate a continuous relationship with Elon's administration and Black faculty, staff and students.

foster a system of support and skills that help Black students traverse their time at Elon University and in life beyond.

The Black Student Union is a student organization whose primary objective is to cultivate a continuous relationship with the administration, Black faculty and staff, and Black students on campus. The BSU's mission is to engage Black undergraduate students and enrich student life at Elon university culturally, intellectually and socially; to ensure the full ongoing administrative commitment of fair, equitable policies; and to strengthen and support the bonds of community between Black Elon students and the larger Elon and Burlington communities.

The Student Mentors Advising Rising Talent (S.M.A.R.T.) program is designed to ease the transition from high school to college, both academically and socially, for first-year and transfer students. First-year students learn from upper-level classmates who are trained to provide guidance and support to make Elon University a more welcoming environment.

Phillips-Perry Black Excellence Awards is a ceremony that was established in 1993. Each spring, Black students who have shown excellence in academics and the Elon Experiences are recognized. This banquet serves as an opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of the Black community and as an incentive for all Black students to continue to excel academically. [In spring 2023 the Phillips-Perry Excellence Awards marked its 30th anniversary.](#)

Black Solidarity Day Conference is the culmination of Black History Month programming. Starting in 2015, it has offered an opportunity for Black students, faculty and staff to explore and gain a deeper insight into what it means to be Black as a member of the Elon community. It also provides a welcome space for non-Black participants who want to learn more about what it means to be an ally, an anti-racist and to actively fight against



There are multiple organizations on campus that support the Black experience at Elon and beyond.

anti-Blackness. In 2023, Alex Bohannon '17, Elon alumnus and founding president of the Black Student Union, gave the keynote address.

Mapping student organizations that support the Black experience

1. Black Student Union (BSU)
2. National Council of Negro Women (NCNW)
3. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
4. Caribbean Students Association (CSA)
5. African Diaspora of Elon
6. Black Entrepreneur Initiative
7. Black Campus Ministry
8. National Panhellenic Council
 - a. Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated – Active on campus
 - b. Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated – Active on campus
 - c. Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated – Active on campus
 - d. Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Incorporated – Active on campus
 - e. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated – Active on campus
 - f. Phi Beta Sigma Sorority Incorporated – Active on campus
 - g. Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated – Active on campus
 - h. Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Incorporated – not Active
9. Black Law Student Association (BLSA)
10. School of Health Sciences Student Diversity Committee

Advisory Board for Black Student Spiritual Support

With the arrival of Chaplain Kirstin Boswell, the Advisory Board for Black Student Spiritual Support (ABBSSS) began the process of reimagining its reach and purpose. The advisory board is co-chaired by Cherrel





Vice President Janet Williams provides leadership for Finance and Administration, the largest division at the university.

Vice President for Finance and Administration Janet Williams and her leadership team have worked with Inclusive Excellence to develop and implement a plan for creating greater inclusion in the division.

Miller Dyce, associate professor of education and executive director of diversity, equity and inclusion in the Dr. Jo Watts Williams School of Education. Together they reconfigured the board to reflect faculty, staff, student and community perspectives on Black spiritual life at Elon. The Black Lumen Project served as a key partner as the group developed a new framework that included addressing the needs of faculty and staff in addition to students. The focus of this group aligned with the ongoing strategic planning for multifaith and spiritual life at Elon.

Initiatives that focus on the Black faculty/staff experience include:

Black Employee Resource Group (BERG)

The Black Employee Resource Group is an organization meant to provide an encouraging environment and career advancement opportunities for Black employees and their affiliates. The group sponsors professional development educational and networking events for faculty and staff and is dedicated to attracting and retaining Black professionals by building Elon's brand as an employer of choice for the Black professional community. Post COVID, this group reemerged and is re-establishing itself to provide consistent monthly events and opportunities for employees to engage in social and professional networking and learn from guest speakers. BERG will expand to include an online community and resource space through support from the Black Lumen Project.

In addition, the Division of Inclusive Excellence is working with leaders across campus to develop plans that create greater inclusion within their units. Vice President for Finance and Administration Janet Williams, who oversees the largest unit of staff at the university, is one of the leaders who is working with Inclusive Excellence to create and implement a plan. Her departments include Business and Finance, Human Resources, Facilities Management, Information Technology, Campus Safety and Police, Auxiliary Services, Administrative Services, Internal Audit, and Planning, Design and Construction.

VIII. CONNECT

Igniting the Way for Black Student-Athlete Connections

Building a meaningful mentoring program with and for Black college athletes at a Predominately White Institution

[Elon University was one of four institutions selected by the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics](#) for a one-year grant to demonstrate how specific interventions impact the Black athlete experience and/or Black athlete advocacy areas. The team included Eric Hall, professor of exercise science, director of undergraduate research and faculty athletics representative; Caroline Ketcham, professor of exercise science; Buffie Longmire-Avital, professor of psychology and director of the Black



A one-year grant is allowing a team of faculty to explore specific interventions that can positively impact the Black student-athlete experience.

Lumen Project; Khirey Walker, assistant professor of sport management; and Tony Weaver, associate dean of the School of Communications and professor of sport management.

The goal was to better ensure Black student-athletes are presented with ample support. This faculty team explored the mentoring needs of Black athletes as well as the overall experience of Black athletes at Elon. Understanding mentor networks and mentor needs of Black athletes fits well within the university's current strategic plans, institutional priorities and the greater call to action ([Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2021; call to action 3.2; 4.1](#)).

To better understand the experience of Black athletes, the team administered a survey to all athletes that identified themselves as Black or multiracial in the spring of 2022 through early summer 2022. The survey asked questions about mentorship (e.g., characteristics of mentors, who are their mentors), as well as questions about their experiences on campus (e.g., integration on campus, belonging, well-being and experience as a Black student and athlete). The initial survey was fully completed by 30 Black athletes (20 males). When separately looking at peer mentors and staff and faculty mentors some interesting results appeared. The peer mentors were mostly Black (59%) and involved in athletics (89%).

The types of support that were identified included athletic, personal and academic. When looking at staff and faculty on campus, 41% of those identified were Black and 81% were involved in athletics. The two primary types of support seeking were athletic and academic. Interestingly, 87% of the students viewed themselves as mentors and rated that they had similar strengths in characteristics as they rated people they seek out as mentors. However, the open-ended question about why they did not see themselves as mentors had answers from most participants. These answers highlighted discrepancies. The characteristics they lacked to be mentors (e.g., age, confidence, knowing resources, training) were not important characteristics for mentors they seek out; an interesting disconnect.



Members of the Alamance County faith community interacting with theological scholar Kimberly Russaw during her visit to campus in 2022.

The 2020 History and Memory report shed light on the multiple ways local faith communities provided support for Black students, faculty and staff.

The findings emphasize the importance of opportunities to support student-athletes as mentors by providing tools, language and resources so they can gain confidence and experience. It also emphasizes the importance of understanding the breadth of support people need and different models of mentoring that can provide that.

Forging Relationships Across Campus and the Community

Revisiting Rehab: Taking Another Look at the Women of Jericho

In March of 2022, the Black Lumen Project, in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society, in addition to numerous other university sponsors, organized a public talk by Kimberly Russaw, Ph.D., and a pre-reception gathering of community clergy across Alamance and Guilford counties. Russaw is a theological scholar and an associate professor of the Old Testament at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminar. Russaw is also an ordained elder in the AME Church. She discussed her latest book with 30 community clergy members, faculty, staff and students. Russaw engaged with faculty and students over lunch. Her final morning on campus was spent in a tea with women of color from the community who serve as faith leaders. The 2020 History and Memory report shed light on the multiple ways local faith communities provided support for Black students, faculty and staff. This event was the first opportunity for the Black Lumen Project to honor and acknowledge this legacy.

Visiting Scholars and Campus Programs: Co-sponsored Events

- **Slay Your Semester:** In February 2022, the Black Lumen Project in collaboration with both the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning and the Office of Leadership and Professional Development brought WellAcademic founder Roxanne Donovan virtually to campus. Donovan held a 90-minute workshop designed to create a safe space for historically underrepresented racial minority faculty and staff to structure their semester for optimal work productivity and wellness.
- **For the Love of bell:** In commemoration of the womanist scholar, Black Lumen Project, African and African American Studies and Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies held a session, "Reflecting on the Scholarly and Social Justice Work of bell hooks," during the 2022 Black Solidarity Day Conference. Faculty and staff shared their reflections on the scholar and the importance of her legacy.
- **Anna Gifty Opoku-Agyeman:** In fall 2022, Black Lumen Project was one of many co-sponsors for the Martha and Spencer Love School of Business campus speaker. Gifty is a rising star economist who focuses on the ways health, education and social justice intersect with Black economic advancement.
- **Wilson Okello:** The Black Lumen Project was one of many campus supporters of this Office of Inclusive Education and Development event.



Okello shared his work on trauma-informed practices in student affairs and anti-Black technologies that shape academic publishing and access. Okello also held a session specifically for Black faculty and staff to explore and share resistance and resiliency approaches in career development.

Providing Important Guidance for Elon's Future

The Elon University Board of Trustees is composed of Elon alumni, parents, grandparents, friends and supporters who are responsible for the university's long-term health, oversight for its strategic direction, educational policy, finances and operations, and for advancing Elon's distinctive mission. Kebbler Williams '98, Ph.D., joined the Board in 2008 and has provided important leadership as chair of the Campus Life Committee and Secretary of the Board since 2014, and also serves as chair of the Dr. Jo Watts Williams School of Education Advisory Board. Other Black members of the Board of Trustees include the Rev. Marvin Morgan '71, Ph.D., Toni P. Brown, Kelli Palmer '98, Ph.D., and Chandler Vaughan '21, who recently completed her final year as Youth Trustee.

In 2020 the Board created a working group on diversity, equity and inclusion charged with advising the Board on these matters, and identifying potential opportunities to further advance this important work. The ad hoc working group reports directly to the Chair of the Board.



The Office of Admissions is committed to diversifying the student body, with a focus on attracting Black students.

IX. RISE

Admissions

Each year the Office of Admissions works to increase the amount of diversity within the incoming class. Donell Moore, director of admissions for diversity and access, and Kimberly Romero, associate director of admissions for diversity and access, have led the diversity recruitment plan to meet the university's goals. This includes attracting qualified students from diverse backgrounds, as well as identifying new geographic recruitment areas. Included in the diversity recruitment plan is a focus on recruiting Black students. Each initiative is part of the annual recruitment plan. The success of these goals and initiatives also relies on the great support of partnerships with Inclusive Excellence, the CREDE, the Center for Access and Success, the Black Student Union and other campus partners.

Current Initiatives

- **ElonYOU: An Overnight Experience**

The 2022-23 academic year saw the inaugural program of ElonYOU, an overnight experience for prospective students at Elon, hosted by the Diversity and Access team in Admissions. Selected students spent the day

The Elon Black Alumni Network actively supports recruitment and retention efforts.



visiting the different identity centers, participated in an academic activity and were hosted by a current Elon student. On the second day, the students and their guests participated in an Open House event. Travel expenses were fully covered for student participants, and expenses up to \$250 were covered for one guest for this inaugural program.

- **The Black Advance**

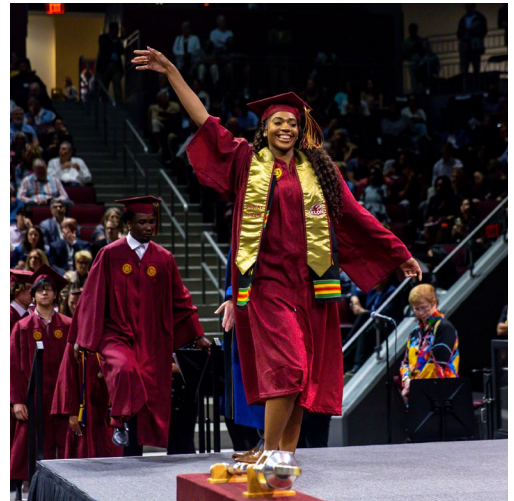
The Office of Admissions hosted two iterations of the Black Advance. In the fall, this virtual program focused on students who identify as Black and their families, and highlights Black success at Elon. Students and families have an opportunity to meet and speak with current students, staff, faculty and recent graduates. In the spring, admitted students joined the second Black Advance event, in which Admissions partnered with the Student Professional Development Center to help students learn more about their future at Elon and highlight recent Black alumni. Students and families also had another opportunity to connect with current students, faculty and members of the Elon Black Alumni Network.

- **Phoenix Fusion**

Phoenix Fusion is a two-day event, with 2023 being a return to the overnight component of the event since 2019. Admitted high school students from diverse backgrounds get an opportunity to get an in-depth look at academic programs, student life and learn more about the diversity of campus. Students that attended the event had the opportunity to stay overnight with a current Elon student, tour the campus and attend evening events hosted by the Black Student Union and other campus partners.

- **EBAN Mentor Support**

This year, in addition to the welcome letter from EBAN signed by the EBAN president, Admissions piloted customizing acceptance letters and were able to match prospective students to EBAN Mentors. These mentors, who were matched with prospective students based on geographic proximity or major, directly reached out to students to offer congratulations and to offer to serve as a resource of support.



**BLACK INSTITUTION
AT ELON IS STRONG,
AND IT WILL BOLDLY
CONTINUE TO GROW
AND EVOLVE.**



ELON
UNIVERSITY

DIVISION OF
Inclusive Excellence
BLACK LUMEN PROJECT