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## ELON SUSTAINABILITY NEWSLETTER

### DRAFT SUSTAINABILITY MASTER PLAN FEEDBACK SESSIONS PLANNED THIS FALL

By: Kelly Harer

In September 2023, Elon University started the development process for the university's [next campus wide Sustainability Master Plan \(SMP\)](#). This fall, there will be multiple opportunities for Elon students, faculty and staff to provide feedback on the draft plan, which has been developed with input from over 100 campus community members. During the interactive feedback sessions, participants will be able to ask questions about the draft SMP goals and strategies and learn about some of Elon's sustainability achievements. A virtual option to provide feedback will be sent via email for those unable to attend one of the in person sessions below.

### DRAFT SUSTAINABILITY MASTER PLAN FEEDBACK SESSIONS

#### STUDENT SESSION

Thursday, October 17 from 6-7 pm in McKinnon Hall  
Snacks provided!

#### CAMPUS CONVERSATION

Friday, November 1 from 2-3 pm in Belk Pavilion 208  
Free lunch is available beforehand in Clohan Hall, Lakeside Dining Hall and McEwen Dining Hall to those who plan to attend the Campus Conversation.



Dr. Young Do Kim takes a photo of the draft Academics Goal and Strategies poster during the Working Groups Summit held in spring 2024.

# FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: JESSICA MERRICKS

BY: MJ VOLPE

Dr. Jessica Merricks is an assistant professor of biology at Elon and a fierce advocate for environmental justice. She co-founded an influential grassroots organization, [Clean Haw River](#), to combat PFAS contamination in the Haw River located in Pittsboro, North Carolina. Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), commonly referred to as “forever chemicals,” are man-made compounds that do not naturally break down in the environment. Once released into ecosystems and waterways, PFAS persist indefinitely. These substances have been [linked](#) to various adverse effects on human health and the environment, raising significant concerns about their widespread presence. Dr. Merricks has not only advocated for clean and safe drinking water throughout Pittsboro and Burlington in North Carolina, but she has lobbied for clean drinking water at the U.S. Capitol to make a lasting impact on a local, state and federal level.



Jessica Merricks in front of the U.S. Capitol in April 2024 to talk with House and Senate members about PFAS in drinking water.

Instead of standing by, Dr. Merricks channeled her passion for sustainability into action. To her, sustainability is most meaningful when linked with environmental justice. As she puts it, “When we are all responsible stewards of natural resources, then everyone can enjoy the benefits, and no one suffers undue burden.” When her town of Pittsboro reported [alarming levels of PFAS contamination](#), she sprang into action. With her work through the Clean Haw River organization, she is dedicated to educating her community and advocating for stronger drinking water regulations.

Dr. Merricks actively engages her neighbors through outreach events, speaks at council meetings to hold leaders accountable and lobbies federal representatives about PFAS in drinking water. She also collaborates with key Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) staff members, inspires Elon students to engage in the mission and presents on environmental justice to the Burlington City Council. Her dedication to environmental justice is deeply intertwined with her commitment to sustainability. Dr. Merricks says it best: “Sustainability is both an individual and a collective journey. I think we make the most progress when we are accountable to ourselves and work together as a group. Local advocacy can go a long way, and one person can make a difference.” Dr. Merricks

## Faculty Spotlight Continued

makes that difference every day—here at Elon, in Burlington and Pittsboro, for the people of North Carolina and even on behalf of her country. Her commitment to environmental justice is reflected in her service activities related to clean water education and advocacy, as well as her academic work in creating educational materials on these critical issues. Dr. Merricks is an admirable advocate, and Elon is fortunate to learn from her and the Clean Haw River organization.

To support Dr. Merrick's mission, consider getting involved with the Clean Haw River. Visit the "[Take Action](#)" tab for contact information on local policymakers and state water authority officials, and don't miss the opportunity to attend town hall meetings.

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## STAFF SPOTLIGHT: HANNA SMITH

BY: AUDREY NOTT



Hanna Smith working on a landscape design.

Elon University's campus is an [accredited botanical garden](#) and its stunning landscapes capture the attention of all who are lucky enough to step foot on it. Hanna Smith is the botanical garden coordinator at Elon. Smith is responsible for designing and helping oversee the installation of the landscape at Elon. Her experience in the horticulture industry is extensive. Smith earned her Bachelor of Science in landscape and ornamental horticulture and a Master of Science in public horticulture, both from Auburn University. She expedited her journey in the field of sustainability when she began working with Master Gardener volunteers around 2015. Smith helped the volunteer program create sustainable gardens and worked with homeowners to assist them in making their home gardens more sustainable as well. Smith's work intersects with sustainability every day. Her job is to choose plants that go in the right place on campus. A plant in the right place will not require as much water or need a large volume of pesticide or fertilizer in order to thrive. Hanna lives sustainably outside of her workdays by recycling, using reusable bottles, switching to metal straws and utilizing cloth napkins instead of paper towels. Elon University's campus is functional, safe and beautiful because of Hanna Smith's dedication and talent.

# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: RYAN GIBBONS

BY: MOLLY RUIZ

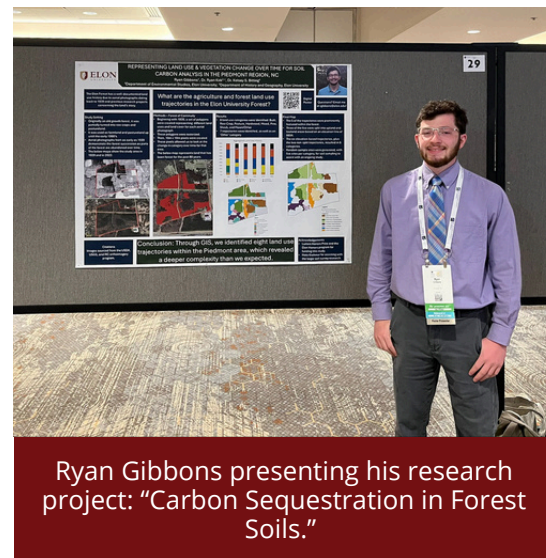
Ryan Gibbons is a senior double majoring in environmental studies and cinema and television arts, providing a unique perspective in the communication of climate science. Ryan's sustainability journey started simply with an awareness of "reduce, reuse, recycle." But what began as a general consciousness grew into a lifelong commitment to protecting the planet.

In high school, Ryan began taking small steps, such as reusing grocery bags and minimizing waste. At the time, it was more about individual efforts, but as Ryan dove deeper into the world of environmental science in college, this passive interest turned into active support. Through coursework in the Environmental Studies department, Ryan started to engage critically with sustainability issues, especially through projects where sustainability was a focal point. Now, Ryan is an advocate for environmental consciousness in every aspect of his life. His work at Elon Hillel has pushed him to think about sustainability from a cultural identity perspective.

A highlight of his involvement came during a Spring Break trip to Berkeley, California, where he led a group of six students on an alternative spring break trip through the Kernodle Center. The group traveled to a fully sustainable farm called Urban Attmah. They learned about sustainable agriculture, including greywater systems and soil maintenance practices. This experience not only deepened Ryan's understanding of environmental stewardship but also connected it with his Jewish identity and the importance of cultural sustainability.

In addition to hands-on leadership, Ryan has also delved into research. His current research project, "Carbon Sequestration in Forest Soils" mentored by Dr. Bitting and Dr. Kirk, focuses on how land-use history affects a soil's ability to store carbon. This research could eventually provide valuable resources for landowners in North Carolina by offering practical strategies for land management. His goal is to make this knowledge accessible through a video series, blending his passion for both environmental science and cinematic communication.

Through his academic pursuits, leadership in community sustainability efforts and personal lifestyle choices, Ryan is taking intentional steps toward creating a more sustainable future. He serves as an inspiring example of how individuals can weave sustainability into every facet of their lives.



# GET INVOLVED

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## CAMPUS AS A LIVING LAB

### Partnering on campus to find solutions to real sustainability issues

Elon University's Campus as a Living Lab program connects students, faculty and staff using Elon's campus for engaged and experiential learning and sustainability research, generating new knowledge to advance sustainability on campus.

Learn more and propose a Campus as a Living Lab project idea or research question on the [Office of Sustainability website](#).

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## SHARE THE RIDE NC

### WHAT IS IT?

STRNC is a free, secure and user-friendly online tool that helps find ridesharing options for commuting or single trips to the airport, beach or wherever else you travel. It also allows users to log their trip to learn about dollars saved and emissions reduced. [Learn more and sign up here!](#)

### HOW TO JOIN:

**REGISTER:** There is an Elon-specific program for students, faculty and staff. Using your Elon email, register for a free account and create a profile!

**FIND A RIDE!** Enter some info about where you want to go so you can view and communicate with potential matches through the system.

## EMERGENCY RIDE HOME PROGRAM

This program reimburses eligible faculty/staff commuters for a qualified emergency ride home a maximum of 4 times in a fiscal year.

### To be eligible, participants must:

1. Be a part-time or full-time employee and
2. Have carpooled, biked, walked, taken the train or a bus to work on the day a ride is needed.

### It's available for commuters when:

1. They or an immediate family member gets sick or has a crisis
2. Their carpool driver has to unexpectedly leave early or stay late OR
3. They must work unscheduled overtime

Learn more [online!](#)



Registration is encouraged and \*required for some events!



# CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY WEEK

October 14-18, 2024

## Monday, October 14

6:30-7 PM | Sustainable Alumni Speaker Series with Devon Johnson '17 (Virtual)\*

## Tuesday, October 15

12-1 PM | Tree Walk (Meet at Fonville Fountain in front of Alamance Building)\*

7:30-8:30 PM | Keynote Speaker, Corban Addison (McKinnon Hall, Moseley Center)

## Wednesday, October 16

9-10 PM | S'mores with Outdoors (Beck Pool Patio)

## Thursday, October 17

3-6 PM | Elon Farmers' Market (Elon Community Church)

2-4 PM | Build your own Birdhouse (Elon Community Garden)

4-6 PM | Culturally Relevant Herbalism & Farming (Loy Farm EcoVillage) \*

5-6 PM | Pop Up Swap Shop (Moseley Center)

6-7 PM | Draft Sustainability Master Plan Feedback Session (Moseley Center, McKinnon Hall)

## Friday, October 18

2-5 PM | Mental Health Hike (Shallow Ford Natural Area – Transportation Provided) \*

4-6 PM | Bike to Burlington (Meet at Koury Athletic Center) \*



Learn more and register on the [Office of Sustainability Website](#).

## Contributors

Elaine Durr  
*Senior Director of Sustainability*

Kelly Harer  
*Associate Director of Sustainability for Education and Outreach*

Annabel Langley '25  
*Communications Intern*

Audrey Nott '26  
*Outreach Intern*

MJ Volpe '25  
*Volunteer Coordinator Intern*

Molly Ruiz '25  
*Sustainability Intern*