

ELON
LAW

Counsel to the Court

Grant Buckner L'13 leads a small team of lawyers making a big impact for the Supreme Court of North Carolina.



Alumni News

WINTER 2020

Bulletin

MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN



Ahead of the Curve

THE CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS released a report in January that reflects just how important it is for graduate and professional schools to change their ways as potential debt becomes a bigger driver of where, or even if, students continue their studies beyond a bachelor's degree. The report's recommendation for law schools: "Eliminate a year and better integrate programs with undergraduate education." Sound familiar?

Since Elon Law introduced its accelerated program with a full-time residency-in-practice during the winter or spring of the second year, we have reduced the average student loan debt at graduation by nearly a third, and we remain competitive with a total program tuition 20 percent lower than the average of private law schools in the United States.

At the same time, we expanded the number of articulation agreements between Elon Law and regional universities where students spend their first three years working toward their bachelor's degree, followed by their legal education here, graduating with a law degree in 5.5 years. Travis Poulos L'20 is the first student to pursue this option at Guilford College and was recently elected editor-in-chief of the *Elon Law Review*.

I know I sound like a broken record. You've told me. But these points bear repeating as legal education faces economic and technological forces that are battering law schools of all sizes, statures, and locations. Even before the Center for American Progress released its report, we were given evidence of the success of our program courtesy of RTI International. We have graduated three classes since introducing this new curriculum, representing a quarter of all Elon Law alumni. You'll find on page 5 details of RTI International's three-year study of Elon Law's program.

Elon Law will continue its focus on making a legal education not only more relevant for student success on the bar exam and in professional life, but also more accessible and more affordable to all, including those underrepresented in our profession. Through the generosity of our alumni, employees, parents and friends, your gifts provide additional scholarships and programming to students, which reduces any strain of debt after graduation. So join us in March for our annual Elon Day where we come together as a university community to support such important work. And, as always, thank you for what you continue to do to help make Elon Law the law school with a difference.

Luke Bierman
Dean and Professor of Law

Stay Connected

ON THE EVE of Elon Law's December graduation, I encouraged the Class of 2019, as the newest members of our alumni community, to stay connected and celebrate our collective accomplishments.

I urge you to do the same. It is now easier than ever to keep in touch with fellow alumni through LifelongElon.com, a dynamic platform for you to engage as learners, mentors, and networkers. Take advantage of an alumni directory to locate Elon University graduates in your city, a valuable tool for growing your professional network and perhaps meeting future clients.

And in the spirit of all that binds us as Elon University graduates, join us for Elon Day on Thursday, March 5, where together we can show that we're "all in



for Elon Law." Visit elon.edu/elonday to learn more about celebrations happening at Elon Law, Elon Day parties in downtown Greensboro and

across the country, and how you can make a difference for your law school alma mater.

As our Elon Law alumni community continues to grow, let us all be reminded of the opportunities that arise when we're together.

Barbara Cini L'11
Assistant Dean for Development

**Go "all in for Elon" on
March 5 by making a gift
to any number of funds
that support students and
faculty at Elon Law.**

Visit elon.edu/elonday on March 5 as we celebrate our shared Elon Law experiences and grow the foundation of success for future students.

- Elon Law Review
- Moot Court / BEF National Moot Court Competition
- Clinical Programs
- Eugenia H. Leggett-Frank Endowed Scholarship
- Elon Law Annual Scholarship Fund
- Michael L. Rich Memorial Award for Excellence in Criminal Law Studies
- And more...

ELON DAY
03|05|20

LAW NEWS & NOTES



Professor Steve Friedland traveled to Denver in October to present at the 40th annual conference of the Council of Chief Judges of the State Courts of Appeal. Friedland explored some of the advances in understanding how the brain works and shows how these advances apply to judicial decision-making.



Assistant Professor Taleed El-Sabawi took part in a New York University School of Law conference focused on legal and regulatory impacts of the nation's ongoing opioid health crisis. El-Sabawi joined with scholars on a panel discussion regarding regulation and reform.

The Southeastern Chapter of the American Association of Law Libraries honored **Amber Cain L'20** with a scholarship aimed at supporting future law librarians. At Elon Law, Cain helps classmates as a student worker in the library and as an Academic Fellow.



Professor Sue Liemer and **Assistant Professor Tiffany Atkins L'11** led or took part in panel discussions in Washington during the 2020 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Law Schools. Liemer moderated "The Multigenerational Teaching of Legal Writing," a discussion group of which Atkins was a part. Atkins was later a discussant for a panel conversation focused on mentoring.



Kjirsten Durand-Johnson L'20 placed second in the 2019 Adam A. Milani Disability Law Writing Competition, a contest sponsored by the Mercer University School of Law and the ABA Commission on Mental and Physical Disability Law.

LOWER DEBT, STRONGER DIVERSITY & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

Elon Law's accelerated curriculum is a key feature for prospective students and the law school looks to have uniquely positioned itself with a distinctive approach to legal education characterized by lower debt, improved bar result outcomes, and increased diversity and inclusivity, according to a new research study by RTI International.

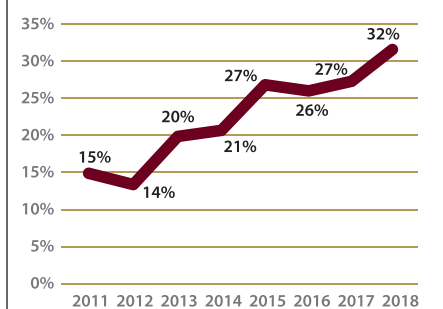
Commissioned by Elon Law through a grant from AccessLex Institute, the report assessed the impact of the law school's move to a 2.5-year curriculum with a full-time residency-in-practice that addresses what Dean Luke Bierman has described as common criticisms of legal education: cost, length, and relevance to the profession.



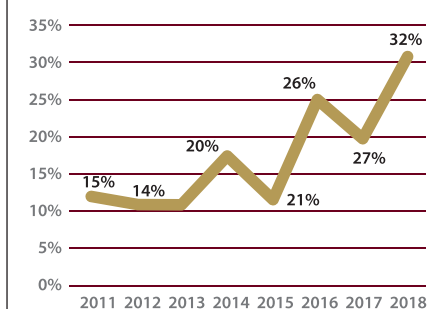
Highlights:

- Most Elon Law students were aware of the law school's accelerated curriculum and focus on experiential learning prior to submitting an application
- Compared with peers at other schools, Elon Law students agree the school encourages contact among diverse students, and the percentage of degrees earned at Elon Law by students of color has almost tripled since 2015
- A combination of lower tuition rates and an investment in scholarship availability has led to a decline of nearly 33% in student loan debt at graduation
- Investments in the Office of Academic Success, plus a move to the Uniform Bar Exam by the North Carolina State Bar, has led to higher bar passage rates

Students of color as percentage of total enrollment at Elon Law, by year



Percent of degrees earned by students of color at Elon Law, by year



The report uses both quantitative and qualitative data, including responses to the national Law School Survey of Student Engagement, as well as internal data related to admissions, bar exam success, and diversity. Several student cohorts have been surveyed during the three-year research project to provide comparative data to the final class that enrolled under Elon Law's previous three-year curriculum.

Read the full report at law.elon.edu

Building an Institutional Memory

Grant Buckner L'13 leads a team at the Supreme Court of North Carolina that crafts rules, reviews opinions, and provides counsel for the state's highest court.

AS ALMOST EVERY LAWYER KNOWS, in every court, at every level of government, there are particular rules and practices that judges expect attorneys to follow.

There are dockets to be organized. There are staffers to be trained and managed. There are behind-the-bench mechanizations crucial to the administration of justice. And that is where Grant Buckner L'13 has found a calling with the Supreme Court of North Carolina.

Buckner oversees a small team of lawyers who bring order to a court celebrating its 200th anniversary. The collective responsibilities of his relatively

new office fall into five broad areas: rulemaking, opinion review, docket management, institutional training, and general counsel.

The Supreme Court is responsible for more than a dozen rule sets, from the Rules of Appellate Procedure to the Code of Judicial Conduct to the Rules of Mediation for Farm Nuisance Disputes. If a rule amendment is needed, Buckner's team in the Office of Administrative Counsel will study the issue and draft proposed language.

"Procedure matters, and rules of procedure need to be clear so that people know how to interact with the courts," he said. "Being able to write rules that

are plain, clear, and usable promotes the administration of justice in our state. And there has been so much room for improvement in this area that we have seen a great deal of progress in a very short period of time."

The team also reviews every opinion before it is issued by the Supreme Court and offers editorial advice to the authoring justice to ensure that the opinion is clear, consistent, and supported with accurate citations. One of the team's newest duties is helping to manage a court docket that has doubled in size within the past year. A state law that took effect in 2019 requires all cases involving the termination of parental rights to be appealed directly to the Supreme Court.

Then there is the training that Buckner's office provides new court employees, as well as counsel offered to the Supreme Court when interacting with the state's Administrative Office of the Courts. Since justices come and go with elections and mandatory retirements, and law clerks do the same, Buckner likens his team to the keeper of the Supreme Court's institutional memory.

North Carolina's top jurist has nothing but praise for Buckner and his team's contributions to the Supreme Court. "Grant has been an invaluable advisor for the court and we appreciate his dedication and hard work. He and his team do so much for us," said Chief Justice Cheri L. Beasley of the Supreme Court of North Carolina. "They make sure that every opinion has been proofread and cite-checked and, with his leadership, we are updating the many rule sets that our court is responsible for and improving access to the courts by making them available online."

Buckner, 35, has strong Greensboro roots. He grew up in the southern part of the city, earned a degree in psychology from UNC Greensboro, and started his professional career at the Center for Creative Leadership, a global

leadership development company headquartered in Greensboro.

At the Center for Creative Leadership, he discovered a passion for learning about how procedures and processes affect the way individuals interact with institutions. That led him to a master's program in industrial-organizational psychology at Appalachian State University and then to Elon Law.

He was hired out of Elon Law to clerk for the Hon. Robert N. Hunter Jr. at the North Carolina Court of Appeals. What caught Hunter's attention was Buckner's educational background in industrial-organizational psychology.

"I'm one of those people who believes that structural changes are more important than individual personnel changes and a behavioral psychologist watches how people respond in systems," Hunter said. "He's a very charming person who takes his work very seriously, but he can do it with a sense of humor that people find appealing. He has a good sense of irony, and that gets you through a lot of bureaucracy and serves you well in a government position."

Buckner so impressed Hunter, and then-Chief Justice Mark Martin, that Martin recruited Buckner to clerk for him and then stay in Raleigh to build Buckner's current office over the course of a three-year pilot program. At the end of that three-year pilot phase, the Supreme Court named Buckner its Administrative Counsel and formally established the office that Buckner now leads.

Buckner lives today with his wife, a teacher, and two young daughters in Cary, where he also serves as an elder in his local Presbyterian church.

Buckner said his greatest professional thrill is making an impact on systems that benefit all people. "I am able to make a tremendous impact because there simply hasn't been a position like mine in the past," he said. "The court has entrusted me with a lot of responsibility, and I carry the weight of that responsibility in everything that I do."



“
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Grant Buckner L'13 with Assistant Administrative Counsel Jen Wyatt (left) and Office Administrator Betse Hamilton. Not pictured: Assistant Administrative Counsel Seth Ascher.

LAW
SCHOOL
UPDATE

A CHARGE TO THE CLASS OF 2019

“It is incumbent on each and every one of us to improve the legal system and make it more accessible to everyone. It is you who has the power and, really, the obligation to transform our legal system into one that truly serves every person as our society continues to change.”

- Cheri L. Beasley, Chief Justice, Supreme Court of North Carolina



ELOON LAW AWARDED 107 DEGREES to the Class of 2019 in a December ceremony in Alumni Gym that featured an address by North Carolina’s top jurist.

Chief Justice Cheri L. Beasley of the Supreme Court of North Carolina encouraged graduates – especially those who have yet to determine what they want to accomplish with a law degree – not to worry if their future plans aren’t finalized. Instead, she said, graduates should embrace opportunities as they arise and to let those opportunities “transform you in ways you never could have imagined.”

FOR THE RECORD

“The Class of 2019 is capable of all things. As our story continues, we will be honorable judges, tenacious advocates, diligent litigators, and so much more. We will become leaders in our families and in our communities and we will take this institution as high as we soar ourselves, because we do it together.”

— Ahmed Mohamed L’19 in the Student Address

“These last couple of years certainly have been challenging, but they’ve also been some of the most fulfilling and rewarding days of our lives. It is truly an honor to be a part of a group that is about to change the world.”

— Thomas “T.J.” Renda L’19, SBA President’s Welcome

“When you pass the bar exam and join this noble profession, you will be a guardian of the rule of law, of a system of governance where facts matter. Where fairness matters. Where civility matters. Where disagreements are settled by passionate advocates who recognize that today’s courtroom adversaries may well be tomorrow’s allies. Those are important attributes in today’s polarized and ‘fiction friendly’ environment.”

— Elon Law Dean Luke Bierman

TRIBUTE TO A MENTOR
AND FRIEND

Elon law’s third annual donning of the kente Ceremony celebrated a transformative educator whose work has impacted nearly every African-American student since the law school’s founding.

In closing a December program that honored members of the Class of 2019, Assistant Professor Tiffany Atkins L’11 and Miriam Heard L’09 called Dean Emeritus and Professor of Law George R. Johnson Jr. back to a stage where he had only a few minutes earlier delivered keynote remarks to students on the eve of their law school graduation.

Johnson joined Elon Law in 2006 as part of its founding faculty, serving as associate dean, interim dean, and from 2008–2014, dean of the law school as it achieved full accreditation from the American Bar Association. Atkins and Heard wanted Johnson to leave with a kente stole of his own, a symbol of his dedication to student success as he approaches retirement in 2021.

“This is by far one of my most favorite things that Elon Law does for its students,” Atkins said. “It’s a very special time when we honor not only the traditions of our ancestors, those rich cultural practices we have gotten from the continent of Africa, but also honor those people who come before us, whose footsteps we stand in, who shoulders we stand on, acknowledging that all of our successes come from the path they paved for us.”

HONORS IN THE
CLASS OF 2019David Gergen Award
for Leadership &
Professionalism

Anna Kathryn Barnes

Selected by a faculty and staff committee that evaluates nominees based on law school activities representing the twin principles of leadership and professionalism, Barnes volunteered as a guardian ad litem, served as an Elon Law Review editor, and worked as both a teaching and research assistant. The Advocacy Fellow traveled to South Africa with the Fall 2018 “Prisoners’ Rights” course led by Assistant Professor Patricia Perkins, participated in the constitutional law appellate advocacy clinic, and served as a 2018 NAACP Kellogg’s Summer Law Fellow in Baltimore, focusing her work on legal issues involving barriers to access in education and other civil rights matters.

Elon Law’s Distinguished Service Award
Haylea Nicole CarterNorth Carolina Advocates for
Justice Award
Ahmed MohamedInternational Academy of
Trial Lawyers Award
Kenneth Logan DeHartNorth Carolina Chapter AAML Award
Jaclyn Frances McKeonALI-CLE Award
Zachary Wayne GreenElon Law’s Michael L. Rich
Memorial Award for Excellence in
Criminal Law Studies
Kenneth Logan DeHartNational Association of Women Lawyers
Outstanding Law Student Award
Haley Marie LohrNorth Carolina Student Pro Bono Award
Deborah Michelle MergnerCLEA Outstanding Student Award
Jonathan Samuel Kidd

CLASS NOTES

2009



J. Aaron Bennett L'09 of Carruthers & Roth, P.A. in Greensboro was selected for inclusion in The Best Lawyers in America 2019 for the practice area of trusts and estates. Bennett was also named to the 2019 North Carolina Rising Stars List by North Carolina Super Lawyers Magazine for the practice area of estate planning & probate.

Kyle Ostendorf L'09 is the new chairman for Make a Wish of Eastern North Carolina, an organization that helps grant wishes to children facing life-threatening illnesses in 49 counties.

Barron Thompson L'09 has filed to run for election in 2020 to serve as a North Carolina District Court judge in Randolph County.

The Hon. Carrie Vickery L'09 has filed to run for re-election in 2020 to serve as a North Carolina District Court judge in Forsyth County.

2010

Nicole Patterson L'10 has been promoted to deputy director of the Labor and Employee Relations Division at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Washington where she provides national-level oversight of labor

and employee relations at the agency and supervises a team of specialists supporting managers at EPA's headquarters.

2011

Alexis Baker L'11 started a new job in July as underwriting counsel for First American Title Insurance Company in its National Commercial Services Division. She and her husband, Brian, welcomed their son, Henry, in May 2018.

Jen Hoverstad L'11 took to the TEDxHickory stage in November for a talk titled "How to Change the World by Being an Influencer" inspired by her 2018 journey with breast cancer. Visit jenhoverstad.com to see the full talk.

Patrick Johnson L'11 of Brooks Pierce in Greensboro, has been recognized in the 2020 edition of The Best Lawyers in America for the practice area of real estate law.



Manisha P. Patel L'11 of the Law Office of Manisha P. Patel, PLLC is serving a second term as president of the North Carolina Association of Women Attorneys. Association members selected Patel during their 2019 annual conference in Greensboro.

2012



Mark K. York L'12 of Carruthers & Roth, P.A. in Greensboro, N.C., was selected for inclusion in The Best Lawyers in America 2019 for the practice area of commercial litigation. York was also named to the 2019 North Carolina Rising Stars List by North Carolina Super Lawyers Magazine for the practice area of business litigation.

2013

Colleen Molner L'13 of Garfinkel Immigration Law Firm in Charlotte was named to the Business North Carolina 2020 Legal Elite in immigration law and was selected to the Super Lawyers 2020 North Carolina Rising Stars.

Courtney Roller L'13 celebrated in June the fifth anniversary of her North Carolina family law firm, Roller Law, PLLC, in Davidson County.

Kelly Smith L'13 of Cary Close Family Law in Raleigh has become a board certified specialist in family law.

2014

Benjamin Sharpe L'14 has been hired as an associate attorney for Clement Wheatley in Danville, Va., where his responsibilities include civil litigation, creditors' rights, and criminal defense.

Merrill Ward L'14 and her husband, Chris Akins, welcomed a daughter, Carson Mary Akins, in August. Ward is assistant general counsel for the U.S. Department of Justice – Federal Bureau of Prisons.

May 2017

Elizabeth Lawson L'May'17 has joined Bennett Guthrie, PLLC in Winston-Salem, N.C., as an associate working in bankruptcy law.

2018

Ashley Henson Grim L'18, an attorney in Wilmington, N.C., with Lea/Schultz Law Firm, P.C. recently published two articles on the NCBA Family Law Section Blog. Grim married Ryan Grim in June 2019.

Why I Give



Elon Law's contributions to the legal profession and the greater community aren't possible without the generous support of those who believe in our mission. Beginning with this issue, the Elon Law Alumni News Bulletin will feature reflections of alumni whose gifts to our law school alma mater help secure the future of our law school with a difference.

"I am so proud to be a member of Elon Law's Class of 2011. I appreciate how much our professors and administrators cared about us and respected us. Because of them, and through the experiences I shared with my class, I achieved my dream of practicing law in Virginia. Truly, Elon Law helped rebuild my professional life. Only an organization worthy of my financial support would have selected such a special class. I'm grateful to give back to help make it possible for another to share in our mutual success."

Bill Vaughan L'11
The Law Office of William B. Vaughan, PLLC
Galax, Virginia

If your reflections on your law school experience inspires you the way it has Bill, visit elon.edu/giving and click on School of Law to make a gift today, or contact Assistant Dean Barbara Cini L'11 at 336.279.9209 or bcini@elon.edu to learn more.

ELON LAW

Alumni Association

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Greensboro, NC 27401

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Student Bar Association officers for 2020 are (from left) President Kia Barrett, Cher Quibang (vice president), Tai Chisholm-Hensley (treasurer) and Casey Robinson (secretary).

Spring 2020 Calendar

March 4: The N.C. Court of Appeals makes its annual spring visit to Elon Law. Oral arguments begin at 2 p.m.

March 5: Elon Day 2020! Join us in supporting Elon Law scholarships and programming on the university's annual day of giving.

April 3: Admitted Students Day

April 4: Women Law Association's annual 5K at Country Park in Greensboro

Ongoing: Spring on-campus interviews (contact lawcareers@elon.edu to schedule)

Stay Connected! We welcome your questions and ideas at lawalumni@elon.edu. Also connect with us, and each other, at LifeLongElon.com



LinkedIn

Go to LinkedIn, search for **"Elon Law Alumni"** and join the group! Also follow us on Elon Law's official LinkedIn page.



Twitter

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The Elon Law Alumni Group:
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