President Leo M. Lambert announces plans to step down

Once his successor takes office, President Lambert will take a yearlong sabbatical leave before returning to service as president emeritus.

Elon University President Leo M. Lambert has informed the Board of Trustees that he will step down as president. The board has launched a search for Elon’s ninth president and Lambert will remain in office until his successor is in place.

Board of Trustees leaders have been working with Lambert to plan a seamless presidential transition. The announcement was made by Lambert to the Elon community on Feb. 13 following the board’s spring meeting. After a sabbatical year dedicated to writing, Lambert will continue service to Elon as president emeritus and professor, and will be available to the new president to primarily support the university’s advancement and alumni engagement offices.

“I believe this is an ideal time for a transition in Elon’s presidency,” Lambert said. “We are completing the final objectives of the Elon Commitment strategic plan and making great progress on the leadership phase of the ‘Elon Leads’ comprehensive fundraising campaign, with a public launch scheduled for 2018. In recruiting a new president at this time, we can ensure continuity of leadership for these key initiatives, as well as anticipate the creation and implementation of the university’s next strategic plan. This will allow Elon to continue to make progress on many fronts as we build a distinguished and distinctive university.

“I expect that 2017 will be an exciting time at Elon,” Lambert said. “We have important goals to pursue and much to accomplish in the months ahead. This will be a year of hard work, anticipation and celebration of our shared achievements.”

Lambert has served as Elon’s president since January 1999. Board of Trustees chair Kerrii Anderson ’79 said Lambert’s extensive record of accomplishments and thoughtful planning of the conclusion of his presidency illustrates why he is one of the nation’s finest academic leaders and why Elon has been so successful during his tenure.

“Leo Lambert has been a dynamic force and an inspirational leader who has propelled Elon to a place of national prominence,” Anderson said. “Over the past 18 years he has dedicated every ounce of his energy to Elon. President Lambert is a man of keen intellect and vision, combining his extensive knowledge of higher education with a compassionate spirit that is evident in the personal relationships he nurtures with thousands of students, parents, alumni, faculty, staff and friends of Elon. Leo and his wife, Laurie, have dedicated almost two decades of service to this institution. They embody all that is admirable about our community and I invite everyone to join me in expressing gratitude to them for their remarkable devotion to our university.”

Elon’s development during Lambert’s service as president is historic, creating one of the great success stories in American higher education. A strong advocate for institutional planning, Lambert led the creation and implementation of two ambitious strategic plans – NewCentury@Elon and the Elon Commitment. The result has been the creation of a model for the modern liberal arts university.
I believe we have created a nationally distinctive university renowned for experiential and engaged learning, with a premium on the quality of human relationships," Lambert said. “Elon is global in its outlook and committed to preparing the ethical, ambitious and thoughtful leaders our world needs. Our success has been a team effort, the result of a committed Board of Trustees, brilliant faculty and staff, loyal alumni and generous and supportive parents – everyone working together with a shared belief that we are building a university that is making a profound impact.”

During Lambert’s presidency, applications for undergraduate admission have doubled, enrollment has grown from 4,000 to more than 6,700, and full-time faculty numbers have increased from under 200 to 425. During this period of growth, student academic credentials increased, average class sizes dropped and the student-faculty ratio decreased from 16-to-1 to 12-to-1.

Nationally accredited schools of communications, education, health sciences and law have been established and Elon gained a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, achieving the highest standards of quality in the arts and sciences. Today Elon is ranked the #1 Southern University by U.S. News & World Report, up from #16 when Lambert took office, and Elon is recognized by U.S. News more often than any university in the nation for excellence in eight high-impact programs that lead to student success.

Throughout his presidency, Lambert has been an advocate for the highest levels of academic excellence. He increased resources for faculty and supported development of the Elon teacher-scholar-mentor model. Professors who excel in teaching and mentoring students are attracted to Elon’s mission, and the university has increased funding to support faculty scholarship and their partnerships with students in research, scholarly and engaged learning activities. During Lambert’s tenure, Elon has established the Center for Engaged Learning and the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning and consistently receives top rankings for excellence in undergraduate teaching.

More than 100 buildings have been added to Elon’s iconic campus during Lambert’s tenure, creating one of the nation’s finest environments for learning. Campus growth has included the following facilities:

**Academic facilities**
- Carol Grotnes Belk Library
- Academic Village, including Lindner Hall and Cannon, Kenan, Gray, Belk, Spence and Numen Lumen pavilions
- Ernest A. Koury Sr. Business Center
- H. Michael Weaver building for Elon University School of Law
- Gerald L. Francis Center for the School of Health Sciences
- Dwight C. Schar Hall, Steers Pavilion and Snow Family Grand Atrium for the School of Communications
- Arts West
- Scott Studios

**Residential neighborhoods**
- Global Neighborhood, including the Great Hall
- Station at Mill Point
- The Oaks, including McCoy Commons
- Colonnades Neighborhood
- Lakeside and Colonnades dining halls
- Danieley Center expansion, including Daniel Commons and Phoenix Activities and Recreation Center (PARC)
- Loy Center expansion
Athletics and recreational facilities

- Rhodes Stadium
- Alumni Field House
- Hunt Softball Park
- Jerry and Jeanne Robertson Track and Field Complex
- Rudd Field
- Worsley Golf Training Center
- Phoenix Club Sports Fields and Francis Center recreation fields

Other facilities

- South Campus, including nine academic, student life and administrative buildings
- Inman Admissions Welcome Center
- Martin Alumni Center
- Sklut Hillel Center
- Elon University Forest
- Loy Farm, including Elon Environmental Center
- Downtown Elon business and residential partnerships
- Downtown Burlington Center for Community Engagement

Buildings currently under construction or being planned include Schar Center, a 5,400-seat convocation facility; Richard W. Sankey Hall for the Love School of Business; LaRose Commons in the Historic Neighborhood; a new engineering and physical sciences building; and additional residential facilities.

In 2003 Lambert spearheaded a drive to establish Elon University School of Law, an effort that culminated in the school’s opening in 2006 in downtown Greensboro. Building strong partnerships with community leaders, the legal community, foundations and philanthropists who provided resources for the school, Lambert advanced a vision of creating a distinctive approach to legal education. Over the past decade, Elon Law has continued to expand its downtown campus, serving as a catalyst to the renaissance of the city center and creating an innovative academic program that emphasizes experiential learning.

During his presidency, Lambert has awarded more than 22,000 Elon diplomas, 54 percent of the degrees conferred since the first graduating class in 1891. He frequently observes that Elon’s national reputation is being built on the achievements of the growing numbers of young alumni. Understanding the importance of alumni engagement to Elon’s future, Lambert has encouraged expansion of alumni programs and staffing, including the creation of the Martin Alumni Center in the center of campus and the establishment of alumni chapters across the country.

Elon has maintained a position as one of the nation’s best values in private higher education under Lambert’s leadership, quadrupling the university’s endowment to $230 million with a priority on funding increased student financial aid. During Lambert’s presidency, the number of endowed scholarships has more than doubled to a total of 613. Lambert led completion of the record-setting $107 million “Ever Elon” campaign in 2011 and has made endowed scholarships a central goal of the “Elon Leads” campaign that is now in its leadership phase.

Lambert’s passion for educational excellence extends beyond the campus to include schools in the Alamance County area. He has been a leading voice for increased investment in K-12 public education and has promoted the university’s involvement in these efforts. He provided inspiration and support for the creation of Elon’s Center for Access and Success, which includes the Elon Academy for area high school students with no family history of college attendance; the It Takes a Village Project, a literacy effort for struggling young readers; and Collegiate Start @Elon, which allows local high school seniors to take Elon courses.
Providing leadership on intercollegiate athletics issues, Lambert chaired the NCAA Division I Committee on Athletics Certification. At Elon, he guided the university through its transition from NCAA Division II to Division I and through conference affiliation changes from the Big South, to the Southern Conference, to the current membership in the Colonial Athletic Association. Throughout the development of Phoenix athletics, Lambert has placed a priority on academic achievement of student-athletes and on their involvement in engaged learning opportunities including study abroad, undergraduate research and service.

Lambert has held a number of leadership roles nationally, currently serving on the boards of the American Council on Education, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB), the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU), the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (board chair), the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education (JNGI), the Piedmont Triad Partnership, and as a member of the NCAA Division I Presidential Forum. He formerly served on two national boards encouraging civic engagement among university students, Campus Compact and Project Pericles.

Lambert has written extensively about post-secondary education and is co-author of a new book, *The Undergraduate Experience: Focusing Institutions on What Matters Most*, published by Jossey-Bass. He was also co-editor of a book about university teaching that was published by the Syracuse University Press in 2005. In 2009, he received the inaugural William M. Burke Presidential Award for Excellence in Experiential Education from the National Society for Experiential Education. In 2010, he received the Periclean Service Award from Project Pericles. He was awarded an honorary doctorate in humane letters from the State University of New York in 2002.

As a prominent figure in North Carolina’s Triad region, Lambert has been named one of the “most influential leaders” for six consecutive years by the *Triad Business Journal*. In 2011 he was named the #1 large workplace leader in a survey by the *Greensboro News & Record*. He has also received the Thomas Z. Osborne Distinguished Citizen Award, the highest honor bestowed by the Greensboro, N.C., Chamber of Commerce.

In searching for Lambert’s successor, the Board of Trustees is forming a 15-member search committee chaired by trustee and former board chair Wes Elingburg P’11. The committee will include eight trustees, including one young alumnus/alumna trustee, three faculty members, two students, one staff member and one member of Elon’s senior staff. Trustees have retained the search firm of Storbeck/Pimentel & Associates to assist with the search.

“President Lambert has helped create an optimistic and collegial culture that promotes continual progress and innovation,” Elingburg said. “Our goal is to find a leader who is ready to embrace the exhilarating challenge of building an ever-stronger Elon, continuing to expand our university’s influence as a leader in higher education.”