



November 23, 2009

Dear Alumni, Parents, and Friends of Elon,

In this digital age in which our lives operate on information overload, I am taking the risk of writing you an old-fashioned letter. Our university is concluding an important chapter in its history, and plans are being carefully crafted to take the institution to even higher levels of excellence and accomplishment. Elon's transformation has captured the nation's attention, as evidenced by the university being named the "#1 School to Watch" by *U.S. News & World Report* for two successive years. But it is most important to me that members of the Elon community, who are an important part of our story, understand our aspirations, dreams, and challenges at this pivotal point in our history. So, if your kitchen counter looks like ours, please separate this letter from the bills and the stack of holiday catalogs, make yourself a cup of tea or coffee, and reserve some time to reflect on Elon's future.

Elon history was made on October 2, 2009, when the Phi Beta Kappa Society, the nation's oldest and most prestigious honor society, founded in 1776, elected to establish a new chapter at the university, only the seventh institution in North Carolina granted such a privilege. Achieving this goal was the capstone of a faculty-led effort headed by Russ Gill, Distinguished University Professor and Maude Sharpe Powell Professor of English, to strengthen the arts and sciences as the foundation of every Elon undergraduate's education. Initiatives included re-establishing a foreign language requirement, reinventing the honors program and establishing the Elon College Fellows program, creating the Lumen Prize for top student scholars, adding dozens of new faculty positions and scholarships for outstanding students, and making major new investments in library resources. Elon's election to the Phi Beta Kappa Society places the institution in the company of America's leading universities and underscores our collective commitment to the great liberal arts and sciences tradition.

The NewCentury@Elon strategic plan that guided us through the past decade envisioned many dreams that became realities: attainment of the highest accreditations for the business and communications schools, opening of the School of Law in 2006 and the Ernest A. Koury Sr. Business Center that same year, and construction of the six-building Academic Village quadrangle. Elon students made historic firsts: Geoffrey Lynn won a Goldwater scholarship, Katie Donovan earned a Rotary Ambassadorial scholarship, Jennifer Romano earned a Fulbright grant, and Breanna Detwiler was named Elon's first Truman and Mitchell Scholar. Elon's nationally regarded service-learning and international education programs won several national awards, including the 2006 Presidential Higher Education Community Service Award and the 2007 Senator Paul Simon Award for Campus Internationalization.

The successful completion of NewCentury@Elon, along with The Elon Vision, the previous strategic plan, has created tremendous energy, confidence, and momentum. The Elon Vision focused on building the modern physical plant and expanding student enrollment throughout the Eastern Seaboard. Building on this success, NewCentury@Elon called for Elon to become a national model of engaged learning and to take the academic program to new heights. Over the past year, a strategic planning committee comprising trustees, alumni, faculty, staff, students, and administrators has been asking big questions about how to build on the foundation of the two previous strategic plans, stay true to our mission, and continue a quest for greater excellence. We call our new plan The Elon Commitment.

The Elon Commitment is based upon the belief that the next major advancement in the university's stature and reputation will be realized through the extraordinary accomplishments of students and alumni, whom we see as tremendous forces for good in the world. Our vision for this next plan is simple and powerful: engaging minds and inspiring leaders for the global good.

Earlier this fall, I had the privilege of interviewing Elon's nominees for major fellowships — Rhodes, Marshall, Mitchell, Fulbright, and Rotary Ambassadorial scholarships. I was moved by the students' ambition, intelligence, vision, and commitment to work for the global good. We are challenged to marshal the powerful values and resources of this university to ensure that our students become leaders in many fields: public service, government, public education, business, religion and spiritual life, science and engineering, academia, journalism, law, health care, and many others. You have heard me say many times that the world needs Elon graduates. More than new buildings and new programs (which are also critical components of the new plan), The Elon Commitment is about creating an institutional expectation that Elon students will be leaders for society. I am inspired by the words of writer and theologian Frederick Buechner, who wrote, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." The Elon Commitment calls for us to help each student find that place.

The Elon Commitment is organized under eight broad themes. Each is described briefly below, and I encourage you to look at the full plan online at [www.elon.edu/strategicplan](http://www.elon.edu/strategicplan).

#### **1. A sincere commitment by Elon to diversity and global engagement**

The Elon Commitment begins with a premise that preparation for leadership and success in a 21st-century world mandates that students have experiences across diverse cultures, languages, races, nationalities, and religious traditions like no other generation before them. Elon must not become a gated community accessible only to the wealthy, so the plan calls for a dramatic expansion of financial aid, funded through endowments and the university's budget. The plan also calls for greater endowed scholarships for study abroad so that 100 percent of our students can have the transformative experience of international study, regardless of family finances. We aim to triple the number of international students and faculty at Elon, open a new multifaith center and additional religious living-learning communities in order to promote rich interfaith dialogue, and strengthen and expand the role of the multicultural center. Further, the plan seeks to build even stronger partnerships with our local schools and to develop the Elon Academy as a national model of university-school collaboration.

#### **2. Supporting a world-class faculty and staff**

Elon's talented faculty and staff transform students' lives by establishing close and academically challenging relationships with them. This is the hallmark of an Elon education. Because the faculty and staff are our most important resource in preparing leaders for the 21st century, The Elon Commitment will pursue a number of initiatives to support them. These include expanding the number of faculty positions on campus to continue to make Elon an even more intimate environment for learning and intellectual and personal growth; providing greater sabbatical, summer research, and released time funding to support faculty scholarship; and making the teacher-scholar model of faculty work at Elon a national exemplar. The Elon Commitment also calls for greater support for our premier undergraduate research program, one of the best ways young adults can move from the role of student to that of junior colleague with a faculty mentor. Recognizing that our staff members are also teachers and mentors of students, The Elon Commitment proposes a new leadership development program that includes resources and guidance for their career advancement. And, of course, the Board of Trustees and I are committed to ensuring that faculty and staff salaries at Elon remain competitive through the next decade and beyond.

### **3. Attaining the highest benchmarks for our academic programs**

In order to place Elon students and alumni in the best possible positions to achieve their aspirations, our academic programs must continue to advance in quality. We must ensure that the law, communications, education, and business schools are highly ranked; that we prepare more students to compete for national fellowships, such as the Rhodes; and that each of our academic departments and programs is challenged to reach the highest levels of quality and distinctiveness. We expect that Elon's general education program, which provides a foundation in the liberal arts and sciences and is already recognized as one of the nation's best, will be strengthened further, becoming a national beacon for excellence and innovation in undergraduate education.

### **4. Launching innovative pathways in graduate and undergraduate education**

Most students who enter Elon today will pursue graduate education at some point in order to be competitive in a world that will increasingly reward creativity, innovation, and specialized knowledge. The Elon Commitment calls the university to consider innovative 4+1 and 4+2 programs, providing attractive options for students who want to combine their undergraduate experiences with professional master's degrees. A good model for this is already in place through our interactive media master's program launched this year in the School of Communications. The plan calls for Elon to carefully consider expanding its portfolio of graduate programs while maintaining strong emphasis on the undergraduate experience. One addition currently under exploration, which would meet a great societal need, is a physician assistant master's program that might be housed in a new school of health sciences. Another innovative idea is to create a gap-year or semester experience that would allow admitted students to defer enrollment for at least a semester in order to participate in a structured program of public service, international experience, and academic study.

### **5. Delivering on Elon's promise as a best-value university**

Elon must take wise steps to protect its major strategic advantage: a value position that offers an affordable tuition rate \$10,000–15,000 below other selective private colleges and universities. As we launch our new strategic plan, we are mindful that our ambitions cannot be financed by tuition increases alone. We will complete the current Ever Elon Campaign and continue our efforts to more than triple Elon's endowment by 2020, another key element of sustaining the university for future generations. The strategic planning committee and the board of trustees have been developing a new financial model for the university that will help sustain our core values; plan for slow and measured growth in undergraduate and graduate enrollments; increase tuition only moderately; and ensure that funds are in place for program enhancements, a faculty and staff salary plan, and new facilities.

### **6. Developing strong alumni leadership to advance and support Elon**

With its remarkably young alumni body, Elon is unique on the landscape of American higher education in that, of our 31,500 alumni, a staggering 54 percent are in their 20s and 30s. We must seize this historic moment to prepare young alumni to assume future leadership on the boards and councils of the university, including the board of trustees. The recent establishment of the Young Alumni Council was a positive step in giving voice to this large segment of the alumni body. The Elon Commitment calls for construction of a new career services center for current students and alumni and for new efforts to engage alumni in helping current students and fellow alumni with job and internship searches. The plan also calls for innovative new programs and communication strategies to keep alumni connected with their alma mater. Following the excellent examples of some of the finest institutions in the United States, we hope to double the percentage of alumni participating in the annual giving program, creating an enhanced culture of philanthropy that an institution of national stature deserves and requires.

**7. Establishing an NCAA tournament tradition along with the highest academic standards for Phoenix athletics**

Intercollegiate athletics are key to Elon's future. A successful athletics program instills a sense of community on campus, builds pride among alumni, and contributes greatly to national visibility. The Elon Commitment imagines an athletics program that is a model of academic integrity and one that enjoys a strong tradition of winning conference championships and advancing to NCAA tournaments. In order for this to occur, Elon will continue to expand athletics scholarships in all sports, especially through increased annual support and endowment gifts. A hallmark of The Elon Commitment for athletics is the construction of a new multipurpose convocation center, providing another showcase facility for Phoenix athletics, as well as for major campus and community events.

**8. Significantly enhancing Elon's residential campus with premier new facilities and a commitment to protecting our environment**

The Elon Commitment calls for investing more than \$250 million in new facilities. One of the signature elements of the plan is the construction of up to 1,600 new beds, increasing on-campus residency from approximately 60 percent to 75 percent. Many new residences will offer single bedrooms to attract more juniors and seniors. Additional Greek houses are planned, and many new types of living-learning communities and theme housing are on the drawing board. Strengthening Elon's strong residential character is one of the most important investments we can make in our future. Expanded facilities are planned for the sciences and the School of Communications. An expansion of Moseley Center will include a new auditorium, and the new Alumni Field House is under construction adjacent to Rhodes Stadium. The plan also envisions encouraging more privately owned businesses in the downtown area of the Town of Elon — more restaurants and cafés, a pharmacy, an ice cream shop, and other locally owned businesses commonly found in college towns. We are also exploring new housing options for faculty and staff within walking and biking distance of the campus. Elon will also follow its ambitious sustainability master plan, which includes introducing more solar and geothermal technology and considering the creation of a land preserve, Elon Forest, to protect a large tract of land north of University Drive.

Since becoming president of Elon eleven years ago, I have had the immense privilege of knowing alumni from the Class of 1924 through the present day. While we have all witnessed much change on the campus, what binds us so strongly together is the constancy of a central Elon tenet — that students and learning are at the center of everything here. Another enduring Elon constant is the continual quest toward higher levels of excellence, not in pursuit of accolades for the institution but to prepare the best minds for leadership for the common good. I hope you will join me and thousands of others who love Elon in keeping close watch on her progress as we write the next chapter in her history together.

Thank you for your serious attention to this letter. I would sincerely be interested in reading your reactions to The Elon Commitment and invite you to write to me at [president@elon.edu](mailto:president@elon.edu).

Sincerely,



Leo M. Lambert  
President