

Policies for Religious and Spiritual Life at Elon University

Adopted June 1, 2019

Mission

The Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life is an intentionally multifaith community that welcomes and affirms people from diverse worldviews and traditions. Our mission is to

Explore and practice the wisdom of our religious, spiritual, and secular traditions, including the worship and rituals of many of our traditions,

Establish and deepen our sense of meaning and values,

Encounter and honor the paths and worldviews of others, and

Live lives of justice, respect, and reconciliation.

Introduction

Elon University respects the religious, spiritual, and secular beliefs, commitments, and values of all members of the campus community, and encourages their free expression. The University has entrusted the University Chaplain, the pastor to the University community, with the oversight of religious and spiritual life on campus, in collaboration with a multifaith team of chaplains, professional staff, and approved community affiliates (non-employees).

Our commitment is to ensure that students have reasonable access to religious and spiritual services, resources, and practices of their own choosing, and to provide opportunities for all students, religious and nonreligious, to explore questions of meaning, value, and purpose. We believe that religious and spiritual life involves respect for all beliefs, traditions, and worldviews, as well as considerate interaction with and learning from one another.

We recognize that there is a dynamic tension between adherence to one's own beliefs and tradition and exploration of the beliefs of others; between the particularity of one's own faith and values and the commonality shared with the faith and values of others. We intentionally choose to maintain this dynamic by honoring the specific aspects of each tradition, including secular and humanist traditions, while also appreciating the fundamental values we hold in common.

The college years are a time of intense learning when students are on a trajectory of growth and change. Identities are shaped, beliefs examined, and perspectives are altered. This process of reflection, examination, and alteration extends to religious and spiritual identity. The chaplains, staff, and community affiliates of the Truitt Center are available to support and encourage students in this journey of seeking, questioning, and self-discovery, within the context of our diverse multifaith community.

Policies

These policies provide the framework for Religious and Spiritual Life on campus, with the goal that religious activity be student-centered, support the holistic well-being of all students, and be conducted ethically and with transparency of purpose.

The Director of the Truitt Center works with the University Chaplain and the Office of Student Involvement to administer these policies for all recognized student organizations, community ministries, and programs within Religious and Spiritual Life. All Truitt Center staff and community affiliates are expected to know and follow these documents and policies.

1. Student Centered. Above all, the education and well-being of students is the primary concern of the University, the Truitt Center, and these policies. Professional staff, community affiliates, and student leaders should take care not to coerce or overburden students with commitments of time, finances, or emotions that interfere with their academic studies or compromise their well-being. It is expected that students will not feel pressured to compromise their own beliefs, practices, or values, or their education and engagement in the larger life of the University. All student groups, community ministries, staff, and community affiliates are required to respect the religious and spiritual diversity that exists within their groups and traditions, as well as the larger multifaith context of the University.

2. Religious and Spiritual Activity on Campus. “Non-university religious groups or organizations that wish to come to the campus to present programs or otherwise encounter students must have the approval of the Vice President for Student Life and Dean for Students. The Vice President will not grant such approval without the endorsement of the University Chaplain” ([Student Handbook](#)). Individuals or groups seeking to engage in ministries or religious work at Elon University *must* consult with the University Chaplain and the Truitt Center regarding religious life policies and standards, and regarding procedures for registering their organization and/or community affiliates *prior* to beginning activity on campus.

3. Student Groups, Ministries, and Programs. All regular activities and programs within Religious and Spiritual Life are classified as Recognized Student Organizations (RSOs), Community Ministries, or University Programs, and except as noted, these policies apply to all religious and spiritual groups, activities, and programs on campus. Both RSOs and Community Ministries are expected to follow all relevant University policies, including the policies for student groups and activities administered by the Office of Student Involvement.

Recognized Student Organizations (RSOs) are recognized through the Office of Student Involvement and fully comply with the Core Principles for Elon University Student Organizations and Clubs (**Appendix 1**). RSOs are fully student-led and comply with the University’s Non-Discrimination Policy. RSOs may have a statement of faith, but they may not require students to affirm it. They may be supported by recognized staff or community affiliates, but this support may not compromise the student-led nature of the group.

RSOs will be included in the Truitt Center list of religious and spiritual groups, and their designated student leaders may reserve space through Phoenix Connect, reserve and use university vehicles, and request student activity fee funding, which must be requested and administered by student leaders.

Community Ministries are recognized ministries that do not meet the full criteria for RSOs. While Community Ministries are expected to develop student leaders, staff may play a larger role in directing the group and selecting leaders. Community Ministries may adopt religious

criteria for student leaders or for participation in certain rituals that are consistent with the organization's statement of faith and core beliefs. Such criteria must be public and transparent, and any criteria, including the expectation to sign or affirm a statement of faith, must be approved in advance by the Truitt Center.

Community Ministries will be included in the Truitt Center list of religious and spiritual groups, and their designated student leaders may reserve space through Phoenix Connect, but because they are not RSOs, they do not have access to student activity fee funding. Community Ministries are not programs of Elon University, and their status on campus is subject to annual review and may be revoked at will and at any time by the University.

University Programs are recognized staff-led programs of the University and the Truitt Center. They include programs and events sponsored by the Truitt Center, as well as designated program areas, such as Jewish Life, Catholic Life, and Muslim Life. Certain programs may support an RSO, but they may not compromise the RSO's student leadership.

4. New Organizations and Ministries. New religious and spiritual RSOs and Community Ministries are chartered and approved by the Vice President of Student Life, in consultation with the Student Life Committee, the University Chaplain, and the Office of Student Involvement. Students interested in forming a new organization or ministry within religious and spiritual life should consult with the Director of the Truitt Center and follow the procedures outlined by the Office of Student Involvement and the Truitt Center.

5. Advisors and Community Affiliates. RSOs are required to have an Elon faculty or staff advisor, and they may be supported by approved professional staff or community affiliates (non-employees). Community Ministries that are supported by approved community affiliates are not required to have an Elon faculty or staff advisor. Each advisor and community affiliate serves as a resource and mentor to students, assists with student leadership development, and provides pastoral care and spiritual support. The University Chaplain must approve all community affiliates before they begin working with students. Community affiliates are required to have appropriate certification or endorsement from a sponsoring organization and provide annual proof of insurance. Community affiliate status is subject to annual review, and may be revoked at will and at any time by the University.

6. Truitt Center Staff Council. The Director of the Truitt Center periodically convenes a council of all staff and community affiliates. This council works together to support the religious and spiritual lives of all students, to collaborate on multifaith engagement, and to promote cooperation and mutual respect. The Council works together to implement these policies and to address problems when they arise. Community affiliates are expected to attend these meetings.

7. University Chaplain's Team. The University Chaplain regularly convenes an executive team of professional staff and chaplains to advance multifaith engagement and inclusive community; to coordinate programming that supports the spiritual needs of all students, faculty, and staff; and to provide pastoral care to the university community in times of crisis. The title "chaplain" is reserved for professional staff of the University with advanced training and experience to provide religious leadership and pastoral care within their respective traditions and to all members of the university community.

8. Student Multifaith Council. Every RSO and Community Ministry is expected to designate a student leader to represent the group on the Truitt Center's Multifaith Council of Student Leaders. This group exists to promote collaboration, interfaith engagement, and communication

among student groups, and to create opportunities for students to encounter and honor the paths and worldviews of others and to foster greater mutual understanding and respect.

8. Pledge of Cooperation. All chaplains, staff, and community affiliates, as well as all RSOs and Community Ministries in Religious and Spiritual Life, are required to follow the Truitt Center's Pledge of Cooperation (**Appendix 2**).

9. Faith Sharing Policy. All chaplains, staff, and community affiliates, as well as all RSOs and Community Ministries in Religious and Spiritual Life, are required to follow the Truitt Center's Faith Sharing Policy (**Appendix 3**).

10. Ethical Framework. All chaplains, staff, and community affiliates are required to follow these policies and all university policies, and to maintain proper ethical boundaries with students. This includes respecting proper boundaries in staff/student interactions and avoiding coercion in any form. No staff may have a romantic relationship with a student. We require all RSOs and Community Ministries to keep the Truitt Center informed of current student leaders and to follow Truitt Center directions for new student recruitment. We expect all RSOs and Community Ministries to respect that students may freely choose to join or leave a group, without pressure or coercion of any kind, and to remove them from mail and email lists and cease contact whenever requested. Student participants and leaders should not be asked or required to make multi-year commitments. We require RSOs and Community Ministries to be transparent in publicity and posting, clearly identifying their core beliefs and any requirements for student leadership, and identifying with integrity the sponsoring group and purpose of any event.

11. Student Concerns. We value the pastoral and spiritual support that our professional staff and community affiliates provide students. We also expect staff to partner as needed with the Dean of Students, Student Concerns Outreach, Violence Response, and Counseling Services. It is especially important to recognize that certain student concerns may be better addressed by professionals in other departments. We expect staff to honor the vulnerability of students wrestling with identity issues and to refer students as needed to appropriate support offices (e.g., Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Diversity Education, and Gender and LGBTQIA Center).

12. Fundraising and Development. We recognize that many of our community affiliates, programs, and ministries raise funds to cover salaries and expenses. Any development work with students and their families *must* be approved beforehand by the University Chaplain and University Advancement.

13. Consequences for Non-Compliance. Staff, community affiliates, RSOs, or Community Ministries that are found not to be in compliance with any of these Policies or University policies, will be notified in writing of the non-compliance with appropriate steps and timeline for correction. Failure to comply will result in penalties determined by the University Chaplain. These consequences may include removal of recognition, probation, additional training or oversight, or dismissal from Elon University's campus.

14. Reporting Concerns. Members of the campus community are encouraged to report any concerns about religious and spiritual life on campus to the University Chaplain or the Director of the Truitt Center. They may also report concerns to any faculty or staff on campus, or use the University's bias reporting process (<https://www.elon.edu/u/bias-response>). Students are also encouraged to consult relevant identity offices, including the Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Diversity Education (CREDE) and the Gender and LGBTQIA Center (GLC).

Appendix 1 – Core Principles for Elon University Registered Student Organizations

These Core Principles were developed in partnership with the Student Life Committee (Standing Committee of the Faculty Handbook as stated in Article VIII, Section 18). It is expected that all recognized student organizations adhere to these principles.

- 1. Student organizations must be formed and administered by Elon students.** Student leadership and the opportunity for student organizations to be self-governing within the policies and expectations of the university are key aspects of the learning and leadership experience. Elon recognizes and supports student organizations as part of its educational mission. Faculty and staff (and in some cases approved non-Elon personnel) are welcomed and expected to serve as advisors, but may not vote or lead the club or organization.
- 2. Student organizations must comply fully with the university's non-discrimination policy.** "The university does not discriminate on the basis of age, race, color, creed, sex, national or ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or veteran's status in the recruitment and admission of students, the recruitment and employment of faculty and staff, or the operation of any of its programs" (*Faculty Handbook and Student Handbook*).
- 3. Student organizations must welcome any Elon student in good academic and social standing as members.** The rationale is, again, that student organizations are part of the educational enterprise of the university so that any full-time student (or part-time student approved by the Director of Student Involvement), who is seriously interested in learning about and participating in a student organization, must be welcomed. There are a few exceptions to all members participating in all activities. Student organizations such as a *cappella* groups, dance groups, etc. may hold auditions; honor societies may set GPA requirements; and some organizations may set selection criteria, such as the social and business fraternities. In addition, some may develop and use criteria to select a smaller set of the members to represent them on certain occasions, but to the greatest extent feasible, the full membership should be included in all activities. For example, competitive groups, such as club sports, may develop and use criteria for selecting travel team to and participate in competitions at other schools if funds are insufficient or it is otherwise not feasible for the entire team to travel. All of these exceptions must be specified in the student organizations by-laws which must be approved by the Student Life Committee.
- 4. The leadership selection of student organizations must be entirely student led and administered following the democratic process specified in their by-laws.** The Student Life Committee believes that, as part of the educational process, student organizations should engage in respectful dialogue over differences in opinions and views, and allow its members to elect the individuals they deem best for leadership positions.
- 5. Accountability for members and officers of student organizations must be based on clearly established behavioral criteria.** Sanctions against, or dismissal of members/officers, must be based on clearly established, written criteria in student organization by-laws, or manuals approved by the full membership (according to procedures specified in the by-laws). Reasons for holding a student accountable must be based on behaviors inconsistent with clearly defined criteria and not subjective questions of identity, belief, or fit. In addition, any conduct process must adhere to basic due process principles, including: written notice to the student that states the incorrect behavior for which the

student is being charged; the opportunity for the student to prepare for, and respond to the charges; and, the opportunity for the student to face the person(s) charging the student. Organization members are also expected to uphold all university policies and may be held accountable based on the behavior by the appropriate department on campus.

Appendix 2 – Pledge of Cooperation

This Pledge of Cooperation is for all chaplains, staff, and community affiliates within Religious and Spiritual Life at Elon University. It applies to all Recognized Student Organizations, Community Ministries, and Programs under the umbrella of the Truitt Center.

We pledge to foster a sense of fellowship and community and to respect the religious pluralism of the Elon University community by:

1. Working in a spirit of cooperation and good will to support and affirm the programs of each organization and ministry; agreeing not to compete for student members; refusing to denigrate any person, identity, or group; and working with students to do the same.
2. Working together to support the spiritual and holistic well-being of all students and to offer programming for the entire University community, while informing the community of our unique religious identities, traditions, and histories.
3. Attending and fully participating in the monthly meetings of the Truitt Center Staff Council.
4. Encouraging regular gatherings of the leadership of all Religious and Spiritual Life organizations and ministries, including participation in the Multifaith Student Council.
5. Agreeing to abide by the Faith Sharing and Proselytizing Policy of the University, and sharing our faith traditions and beliefs only with those who invite us, and doing so in respectful unpressured ways that allow for dialogue and dissent.
6. Refraining from pressuring or manipulating students into participation in our groups or activities, and respecting students' freedom to leave an organization or ministry at any time. This includes not restricting students' freedom to engage other groups, and not requiring student participants or leaders to make multi-year commitments. Respecting and encouraging students' critical and independent thinking, and affirming the value of voluntary reflection and questions about belief, we refrain from demeaning or judging others' religious heritage or eternal standing, and will work with our students likewise.
7. Making our affiliation clearly known in our contact with others on and off the Elon University campus in all correspondence, flyers, and publicity, including electronic communications and social media.
8. Being responsive and accountable to the University Chaplain, the Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life, the Office of Student Involvement, and the Division of Student Life.
9. As a person with a vocation to work in a multifaith setting, welcoming all students at events, working respectfully with staff and community affiliates of other traditions and faiths, and pledging to respond to individuals in need of our compassion and advocacy regardless of their religious or nonreligious identity.
10. Working with the students and student leaders in our organizations, ministries, and programs to do the same in honoring this Pledge of Cooperation.

Appendix 3 — Faith Sharing and Proselytizing Policy

In order to live and work together in respectful and faithful authenticity, to foster transparency, and to ensure the spiritual and emotional safety of members of our community, the Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life has adopted the following guidelines for religious organizations, community ministries, and religious professionals working on the Elon University campus.

Faith Sharing Statement

Some of our religions mandate evangelism and the sharing of faith. For others this is a foreign, surprising, and even disturbing notion. In order to live and work together in respectful and faithful authenticity, we support respectful faith sharing as a way of being in conversation and dialogue about the good news we discover and live towards in our faiths, perspectives, and traditions. These conversations should be initiated as invitation, with transparency as to their nature and intent. Ideally, they will occur organically between friends, in the context of relationship and kindness. If an invitation to “conversion” is made, we trust that it will be in an openly advertised context, purely invitational in nature, that recipients will have the freedom to answer honestly, and that all relationships will be entered into with integrity and for the sake of friendship alone. **We affirm faith sharing that is invited and welcomed, respectful and transparent.**

Safety and Choice

As in any relationship, students must be safe and have the choice to dissent or to discontinue a given conversation. We decry any form of pressure, coercion, judgment, diatribe, ganging up on, or other subversive means that call into question a person’s eternal standing or tradition, and relationships that objectify persons by making them targets or means to an evangelistic end. Student well-being and interfaith exploration are harmed by these actions.

Transparency of Intent

We require transparency in publicity and relationship. All marketing from religious life groups on campus must clearly identify the sponsoring organization or ministry. Outreach and evangelistic events must be plainly identified as to purpose with the sponsoring organization’s identity. When outside religious groups are part of evangelistic endeavors, the external groups and speakers must be clearly identified. Full disclosure of the nature of the event is required in all personal invitations and publicity, including print, electronic, and social media.

Specific Guidelines

1. For faith sharing to be invited, the intention to share one’s faith must be clearly indicated. When a “conversion” is hoped or expected, we require members of our community to ask and receive permission to share on this level, and for their intentions to be clear. For example:
 - May I share my faith and beliefs with you?
 - Would you be willing to attend an event where my religious community will present our tradition and faith?
 - This service or event will include an invitation to become a.... You have a choice, and we hope you won’t feel pressure. Are you OK with that?
2. Students should not be proselytized or recruited to join religious or spiritual groups in their private spaces (e.g., residence halls), nor should they be approached randomly on campus, in dining halls, or on social media. Flyers and information may be distributed in public spaces

reserved for that purpose (e.g., Student Organizations Fair, Moseley Center tables, tables at College Coffee), but students must be given an opportunity to approach the table first to learn more, and students (not staff) should take the lead in such engagement. Again, a respectful invitation is expected: “May I give you a flyer? Would you like information about...?”

3. Faith sharing and evangelistic events should be respectful of other people’s spiritual integrity and their freedom to make their own decisions in matters of faith and identity, and no person, identity, or group should be denigrated in the process, nor others’ eternal standing judged.

4. All groups, staff, and community affiliates must follow the University’s policies for posting and publicity, available through the Office of Student Involvement, and register events through Phoenix Connect. Again, the sponsoring group, religious tradition, and purpose of each event must be clearly identified, especially if the event is of an evangelistic nature.

5. Students must be free to dissent or to leave a conversation, group, or event at any time without judgment. No student should feel pressured, coerced, or manipulated to join a group, to attend an event, or to identify with a particular tradition or set of beliefs. This includes not forcing unwelcome and overly judgmental beliefs onto students concerning religious or other identities, including gender and sexuality. If students want to leave an off campus event, such as a retreat, those organizing the event should assist the student in returning to campus.

6. While this list is not exhaustive, the following behaviors are examples of actions that are not acceptable under this policy:

- Door to door or other organized campaigns within residence halls, including distributing literature.
- Denigrating or de-legitimizing a person’s religion, philosophy, or lack thereof.
- Denigrating any of a person’s identities, including gender or sexual identities.
- Sending unsolicited flyers or religious literature to student mailboxes or emails.
- Distributing literature or “witnessing” in ways that individuals cannot easily or comfortably avoid. (It’s preferable to allow interested students to approach first.)
- Refusing to accept “no” as an answer to literature, conversation, or conversion.
- Persistence in personal invitations to a group meeting or activity after the invitee has clearly indicated a desire not to participate.
- Practices that discourage critical, independent thinking and questioning.
- Practices that ask students to sever ties with close friends and family who are not members of a group or religious perspective.
- Practices that prohibit students from being part of other religious communities or groups.
- Requiring time or emotional commitment that interferes with academic studies, student well-being, and full engagement with normal campus life.

Consequences for Violations

Religious organizations on campus are subject to penalties as determined by the University Chaplain. Severe or continued violations may result in loss of recognized status and dismissal from Elon University’s campus.

In the unfortunate circumstance that a member of our community finds themselves the target of high pressure or subversive faith sharing, please report the details immediately to the University Chaplain Janet Fuller <jfuller3@elon.edu>.

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