



LIFE WITH *dietary* *restrictions* ON CAMPUS

With vegetarian and gluten-free diets on the rise, students explore dining options

Rachel Wingrat

Elon News Network | @elonnewsnetwork

Vegan and vegetarian diets have gained popularity in recent years, according to Elon University's registered dietitian, Amanda Cerra.

"The new generations coming up are very concerned about the environment; they're very concerned about animal welfare," Cerra said. She predicts vegan and vegetarian diets will continue to grow in popularity.

Cerra has also seen an increase in the number of people eating a gluten-free diet.

Elon has had to adapt to the changing diets of its students, and Cerra said that the school is constantly working to increase the amount and variety of vegan and gluten-free food in the dining halls.

According to Elon Dining director of operations Michael Bellefeuille, Elon has more on-campus dining options per capita than any other school of its size.

But does a variety of options translate to a variety of vegan or gluten-free food?

Going vegan

Branden Oak is originally from Hastings, England, but is studying abroad at Elon during his second year of university.

After learning about the animal welfare and environmental issues associated with the meat and dairy industries, Oak decided to adopt a vegan diet.

"I didn't feel morally sound," he said. "Now, on a moral level,

I feel great."

Oak said the meat industry has environmental impacts as well.

According to People for Ethical Treatment of Animals, animal food production is one of the largest contributors to climate change, surpassing the transportation industry.

These reasons are driving factors behind the rising number of vegans and vegetarians in the United States. A study by Report Buyer found that 6 percent of Americans had a vegan diet in 2017, an increase from 1 percent in 2014.

Oak says overall he feels much healthier since changing his diet. While cutting out meat and dairy may seem intimidating, "It's actually super easy," Oak said.

Oak has found that maintaining a vegan diet at Elon is not difficult because there is always something in every dining hall for him to eat, but sometimes the variety of vegan options is lacking.

According to Cerra, one of the biggest challenges with a vegan diet is maintaining variety.

"Sometimes Lakeside has some good options in the 'Mean Greens' section, but usually Clohan and Green World have better options for me," Oak said. "The option for vegans will sometimes be vegetables and that's it."

Being gluten-free

Sophomore Zoe Budsworth was diagnosed with celiac disease in August, and has been adjusting to her new dietary restrictions.

Celiac is an autoimmune disease where eating gluten can damage the small intestine and lead to other health complications.

According to the Celiac Disease Foundation, it is estimated that one out of 100 people worldwide has celiac disease.



Elon Dining works to accommodate students with dietary restrictions, one option being Greenworld at 1889, located in Clohan Hall.

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NEW DIETS ON THE RISE

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"The transition was very tough," Budsworth said. Initially, she met with Cerra to learn about what foods in the dining halls were safe for her to eat, and Cerra advised her to always ask if she was unsure about a food.

Freshman Alex Xouris is also gluten intolerant, and, like Budsworth, he spoke with Cerra when he first came to Elon. When a student comes to Cerra for help, she will walk through the dining halls with them and point out what they can and cannot eat.

Cerra showed Xouris that he can request a gluten-free pizza from Tuscany, the pizza station in Clohan, which he called a "hidden easter egg." Sometimes Clohan also has gluten-free pasta upon request, and, according to Cerra, will always have a gluten-free protein.

Despite the gluten-free pizza and protein, both Xouris and Budsworth often choose to eat at Lakeside be-

cause it has The Edge, a gluten-free section. And though it may not have as much variety as Budsworth would like, she always knows that there will be something safe for her to eat at Lakeside.

Budsworth has learned to pay close attention to labels in the dining halls because oftentimes foods that appear to be gluten-free do contain gluten.

"You really have to think about where you eat," she said. The biggest issue she has is at the international station in Lakeside because she said the labels can be unclear. "You think, 'Oh this is gluten free because it's just beef in sauce,' but it's not because it has flour in it," she said.

The best ways for students to know their options beforehand are the menus on the Elon Dining website and the screens outside each dining hall. The website includes a "dietary filter," which allows students to flag allergens and dietary preferences.

Elon's evolving options

Cerra believes that the vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free diets are the major restrictions represented on campus, and she has seen the number of vegan and vegetarian students increase since she started at Elon three years ago.

While she is not aware of students with other dietary restrictions or preferences, such as Kosher or Whole30, she recommends that anyone struggling to find things to eat in dining halls should ask her for help or make requests for food they can eat.

"A lot of students go through college trying to figure it out on their own ... and sometimes we have items that they didn't even know existed," she said.

Both Xouris and Budsworth said that working with Cerra helped them find healthy and diverse gluten-free options on campus, but may not have known about them otherwise.

Cerra said that student concerns are always taken into account and can influence the food in the dining halls. Students can even write their requests on a napkin and hang it on a wall between Clohan and Greenworld at 1889.

Recently, a student pointed out that there were no vegan options at Midnight Meals, so now there are vegan pizza and "chicken" nuggets available on request.

"This year, being vegan at Elon is much easier than last year, and I attribute it to people speaking up," sophomore Emily Lane said. "Elon is willing to work with dietary accommodations, but you need to ask."

According to Cerra, Elon is leading the way when it comes to vegan and gluten-free options. She believes that the online menus and access to a registered dietitian make Elon "more transparent" than other universities when it comes to dining.

Bellefeuille says the reopening of McEwen Dining Hall will provide even more options for students with dietary restrictions. "Food is so personal to everybody. ... You need to offer as much choice as you can," he said.