

Elon readies for Phi Beta Kappa

University hopes to join the 262 prestigious PBK institutions

Matt Belanger

Reporter

Numerous changes are being made on Elon's campus as the university attempts to meet criteria for a Phi Beta Kappa chapter. Meeting the requirements for Phi Beta Kappa is just one part of the NewCentury@Elon plan's goal to raise the bar on academic programs.

"You have to remember, the journey is as important as the goal," said Steven House, dean of Elon College, the College of Arts and Sciences. "It's not just about Phi Beta Kappa; it's about enhancing academic excellence."

Currently, 262 institutions host Phi Beta Kappa chapters. Receiving a Phi Beta Kappa chapter is considered an indication of a superior arts and sciences institution.

To reach this goal, Elon has formed a Phi Beta Kappa committee, which consists of a group of administration and faculty members and a student. This team works to

develop ways for the university to move forward in the application process. Their suggestions are passed on to a subcommittee that develops detailed action plans.

House explained that while the university is working toward Phi Beta Kappa, the improvements being made on campus are benefiting all areas of the university. As part of the preparation process, Elon is making extensive investments in library acquisitions and technology resources as well as adding scholarships and new faculty members.

The newly created Elon College Fellows program is designed to encourage more students to consider majors in the arts and sciences. House said this is a key part of preparing for Phi Beta Kappa.

"You have to really have the centrality of arts and sciences," House said. "They look for institutions that have a pool of qualified Phi Beta Kappa students."

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—Steven House, dean of Elon College,
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House said applying colleges and universities must have a certain percentage of majors in the arts and sciences with high GPAs. Additionally, the number of students attending graduate school has an impact on whether or not an institution is accepted.

To meet these standards, the fellows programs was designed. The group is made up of 60 students equally divided among the areas of math and science, human services and social science. These fellows will have special opportunities throughout their academic careers at Elon. Next year, the fellows will take a special Winter Term course titled Arts and Sciences in Action, which will include a week spent in

Washington, D.C.

Changes have also been made to the Honors Fellows program to encourage more double majors. House says he hopes this would encourage students to double major, with at least one of the majors falling within the arts and sciences. He says this is another way that the university can help to boost the number of arts and science majors and come closer to meeting the requirements of Phi Beta Kappa.

However, the number of students admitted into the Honors Fellows Program was dropped from 80 to 40 to counter the development of the Elon College Fellows. According to House, these students will experience an enhanced curriculum and extensive faculty mentoring in preparation for a culminating senior thesis. Nevertheless, students aren't the only aspect that the university focusing on in order to prepare for Phi Beta Kappa.

Ten percent of Elon's faculty in the arts and sciences graduated from a Phi Beta Kappa institution. Having faculty with a background in Phi Beta Kappa is another requirement for an institution to be considered for admission. Elon's goal is to raise that percentage to 12 percent. House explained that when interviewing new faculty members, he looks for a faculty member who has a passion for teaching and who will be a good addition to the Elon community. However, hiring more faculty with Phi Beta Kappa backgrounds will help Elon to continue its tradition of having an outstanding team of professors, so it does go into consideration.

In 2000, Elon submitted a preliminary application for Phi Beta Kappa and was turned down. House explained that it is almost impossible for a university to be accepted the first time it applies. Also, because applications are only accepted every three years, House said it can take a very long time before an institution is offered admission to Phi Beta Kappa, if admission is offered at all. House recalled one university that applied repeatedly for 100 years before being offered a chance to advance in the application process.

"Phi Beta Kappa is a step-by-step process," House said. "It takes time."

House said that based on the changes he has seen in the past two years, it is possible that Elon could be accepted to Phi Beta Kappa within the next six years.

"Having a Phi Beta Kappa chapter speaks to the institution you are getting a degree from," House said. "It is a recognition of academic excellence—and we're well on our way."

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