

# Style

## The Phoenix: bearing the burden of being the mascot

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Design Editor

Although the person inside the suit must remain anonymous, the student holding the position of the Elon Phoenix has an important role at the university: The Phoenix is known by everyone and represents every aspect of the school.

"The Phoenix represents our school's history with the fires and our rising from the ashes, our school's present with a wise and strong symbol of renewal, and it represents our future as we continue to grow and better ourselves as a community," the Phoenix said.

The Phoenix is present at many sporting events and other special events like freshman orientation and Elonthon. It is there to energize the crowd and give students a sense of pride for the university.

"When you see the bird, you think positive things," said Trip Durham, the associate athletics director for marketing, promotions and home game management. "Whether it's an experience you had with the mascot at a past event or what you feel about Elon, you should never look at the Phoenix in a negative light."

With this high standard, the student with the role of the Phoenix has a difficult and important task: he or she must do whatever it takes to represent the school in an appropriate way.

The costume alone presents a heavy burden, literally. The suit and head weigh approximately 100 pounds, with most of the weight concentrated on the person's shoulders and neck, and in the shoes, which weigh about 10 pounds each, according to the Phoenix.

"There's about an inch and a half of padding around your body, which is then covered in fur, and then two heavy shoes," the Phoenix said. "The head is very heavy and it rests on your shoulders. Turning it requires a lot of neck muscles, and it's really hard to see — it has screens in front of it, and it's only a small opening."

With such a heavy suit, heat is a serious problem whether it is a hot day or not. On hot days, it can feel 20 degrees warmer than it is outside. But even on cold days, it is still hot in the suit.

The day before game days, the Phoenix drinks plenty of water because of the amount of water weight that will be lost. It is also important to stay in shape.

In addition to the physical burden of wearing it, the Phoenix costume can present other difficulties. The current Phoenix learned this the hard way while getting dressed for the first time.

"The former mascot showed me how to put the suit on and then left me in the room to figure it out on my own," the Phoenix said. "There were fluorescent lights in the room and I hit the light with the head, and it broke. So I was standing there in the dark with the costume half on. It was the most traumatic dressing ever."

Now, the current Phoenix always helps trainees their first few times.

The mascot is also responsible for making any repairs to the costume, and for keeping it in a good condition.

When people see the Phoenix, they have certain expectations. They expect it to be friendly, charismatic and entertaining.

"The mascot must be friendly to all fans from 4 to 84," Durham said. "The mascot should always represent the school well in the face of the other team. The mascot should never be in a position to break the image of what

people see. The bird should never take its jersey off or take its head off. In short, the mascot should always remain in character."

The current Phoenix does this by treating the job as a performance and a sport.

"It's just like cheerleading," the Phoenix said. "In cheerleading it's as much about the smile on your face as it is about the stunts you're doing."

The mascot is another part of the cheer team, and has the same coach as the cheer team. It even goes with the team to the National Cheerleading Association camp, where the current Phoenix has been a two-time All-American and two-time most improved mascot.

This semester, the Phoenix has added a new element to its performance: a stunt. The Phoenix, in full costume, is lifted up by male cheerleaders, something very uncommon at other universities.

"I'm more of a prankster than a stunt person," the Phoenix said. "In my mind, the character of the Phoenix is this little kid who likes to mess with everyone and be a prankster and just really have fun with people. It likes to flirt with people, really likes little kids and likes people's food. And just generally really likes dancing like a nerd. I might not dance well, but I dance in public."

Engaging the fans not only makes the game more fun for the crowd, but also helps the teams. It keeps the fans interested in the game so they are more supportive of the team.

"I think it's important that we have the Phoenix to help get the crowd involved," said Preston Stanley, an Elon cheerleader. "It really helps the cheerleaders."

Keeping the kids entertained so their parents can enjoy the game is an important part of the job.

There is a group of about 20 children who attend every football game, and the Phoenix is always sure to pay attention to them.

"At the beginning of the season [the children are] really wary," the Phoenix said. "They'll let mommy hold them and look at the Phoenix, but if I come near them, they scream bloody murder. Then later in the season they get more comfortable and they can't wait for their parents to put them down so they can hug me."

"[The Phoenix] makes the game so much more enjoyable for the kids," the Phoenix said. "I just know that when they leave there they saw the Phoenix and the Phoenix gave them a high five, and they can leave the game and it's a good day."

But not all fans are friendly to the Phoenix.

The current Phoenix said it has run into problems with people harassing or even physically hurting it.

In its first season as the Phoenix, it was walking near the concessions during a football game when it heard running feet approaching.

"Usually it's little kids who want to hug me," the Phoenix said. "So I didn't get on the defense or anything."

But really, it was a group of college-aged guys who had been drinking. They tackled the Phoenix to the ground.

"That isn't something you do to your team's mascot," the Phoenix said.

The Phoenix was mostly unhurt aside from some painful bruises, but learned an important lesson from the incident. Because of the rules associated with the mascot, while in costume the Phoenix is not allowed to

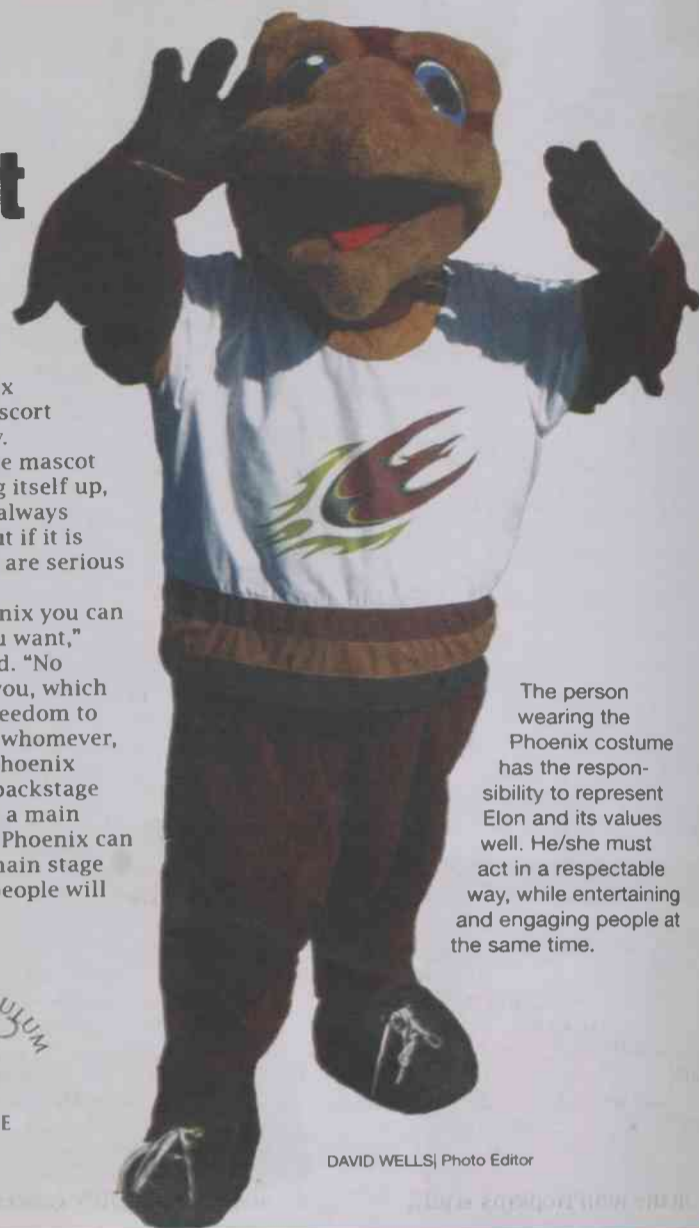
be aggressive toward anyone. But now, the Phoenix always has an escort to ensure safety.

Right now the mascot team is building itself up, and people are always invited to try out if it is something they are serious about.

"As the Phoenix you can do whatever you want," the Phoenix said. "No one knows it's you, which gives you the freedom to do whatever, to whomever, wherever. The Phoenix doesn't need a backstage pass, much less a main stage pass. The Phoenix can walk onto the main stage of a show and people will cheer."



DAVID WELLS | Photo Editor



The person wearing the Phoenix costume has the responsibility to represent Elon and its values well. He/she must act in a respectable way, while entertaining and engaging people at the same time.

Wednesday, November 19th is  
**Blackout Elon Day**

You can be a part of it:

- Wear black
- Stop by the table in Moseley
- Pass along Blackout Elon clothespins
- Watch the Blackout Elon movie trailers on YouTube



**Blackout Elon**

*Telling the Truth About Alcohol*

*Blackout Elon is a social norms campaign that aims to correct misperceptions about alcohol use among Elon students. This is an initiative of the Office of Substance Education.*

For more information, contact Lauren Martin or visit  
[www.elon.edu/substance\\_education](http://www.elon.edu/substance_education)