

# New early childhood education major allows Elon students to help kids get head start

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News Editor

Starting in the fall, Elon University will offer a new early childhood education major. In the making since 2009, the program features many classes designed specifically for the major and the education department is in the process of hiring a new professor.

"There was always that vision that we would go from birth all the way up to grade 12 for teaching in the department of education," said Mary Knight-McKenna, assistant professor of education. "The time was right now."

Knight-McKenna said there has been an interest in the program for some time. Although the major consists of a total of 70 credit hours, including two eight- and one 10-hour experience-based courses, she said the hope is that some current students may be able to switch majors and still graduate on time.

The new early education major will come at a time of many budget cuts to early education programs nationally and around the state of North Carolina, which is why students will need to be politically active, Knight-McKenna said.

"When people are looking for places to cut the budget, they think 'well maybe this is frivolous' or 'this is extra,' or 'this is not needed,'" she said. "They're not really understanding the fundamental importance of this. The outcomes of early childhood education are astounding."

One of the courses, Early Childhood Research, Policy and Practice, is also required for students wishing to minor in the program. It will give students the foundation they need to be able to be activists for their students when the time arises.

"It's designed to get students to focus on the policies in the area of early childhood (and how they) match up with the research," Knight-McKenna said. "We have legislators who are making important



Mackenzie Paul, 5, plays at the park. Paul attends Nathanael Greene Elementary in Greensboro. Top right: Elysia Mejia, 8, played at the park this past Saturday. Mejia attends Sedalia Elementary in Gibsonville. Bottom right: Diego Mejia, 6, slides down the slide. Mejia, who is autistic, attends Irving Park Elementary. A new early education major at Elon will provide students with the necessary skills to work with young children in the classroom.

decisions about funding and they don't know what the research says."

For every dollar invested in early childhood education, taxpayers save \$7, research have shown. Knight-McKenna said this estimate is a conservative one, and studies have shown that early childhood saves tax dollars by having fewer students go into special education, fewer individuals ending up in jail and more people having gainful employment.

"All of these things can be traced back to early childhood education," she said. "But, not every politician knows that."

Freshman Katie Johnson, a Teaching Fellow currently majoring in special education, said she is excited about the new program and would like to try to pursue a minor.

While she does not have enough room in her course schedule to easily complete both a special education major and an early childhood education minor, she said the combination would be ideal.

"I'm excited about this opening up," she said. "Having an early education minor makes me more marketable as a teacher because I can work in any department."

One of the programs



Johnson said she is interested in pursuing following graduation is "More at Four," a state-funded pre-K program for disadvantaged four-year-olds.

"Most people come to this with a deep love, a hunger, a desire and really wanting to have the best outcomes for children," Knight-McKenna said. "People come to it with real excitement. They really want to do this."

Students wishing to sign up for classes for the major or minor can do so during spring registration.

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VIDEO: Hear Mary Knight-McKenna share her hopes for the early education program.

<http://bit.ly/TPOeducation>

# Elon students spur change in handicap parking policies

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The recent complaints and persistence of two Elon University students has brought about a new awareness of handicap parking on campus. Senior Maggie Castor and junior Jessica McDonald recently challenged Campus Safety and Police in order to draw attention to parking policies and regulations at Elon.

Castor said she first noticed the Campus Safety and Police cars parking in handicap spaces when she was helping McDonald get around campus with a broken leg.

"I only saw one police officer, but Jess saw catering services and other university vehicles," Castor said. "I started spreading the word and talking to people, and I received a lot of verbal support."

McDonald received a temporary handicap parking pass from Disability Services after she broke her leg, and said on one occasion she noticed security cars parked in handicap spaces between Colonnades Dining Hall and Colonnades residence hall. Castor and McDonald then reported this incident to the police.

"A few days later, a friend was driving me to campus for a meeting in Belk Pavilion," McDonald said. "There are two accessible parking spaces between Spence and Belk Pavilions, so I was hoping to park there, but there

was an Elon Catering vehicle in one accessibility parking space and the other was legally occupied, so I had to park elsewhere. Luckily, I'm able to walk longer distances without too much trouble, but I was still irritated with the Elon Catering vehicle."

Chuck Gantos, director of Campus Safety and Police, said he asked the officers about the incidents after he received a complaint from Castor. He said one of them admitted to parking in a handicap space.

"The officer explained the poor judgments, and we immediately put out a memo to campus police and campus security," he said.

After the reported incidents, Gantos said a written directive was created and any future incidents will be a violation of departmental policy. He said it was an incident that shouldn't have occurred, and Campus Safety and Police will fix the problem.

Gerald Whittington, senior vice president for business, finance and technology, also sent out a memo to all departments, staff and personnel, according to Gantos.

Gantos said parking enforcement security officers patrol the campus and reinforce parking rules during the day, and security officers enforce it at night.

"It was an incident that shouldn't have occurred and we'll fix it, now there's a written directive so it would be a violation of departmental policy,"



When students Maggie Castor and Jessica McDonald noticed university vehicles parking in handicap parking spaces, they immediately brought the matter to the attention of Elon administration.

he said. "If we are responding to an emergency we will park in a fire lane or wherever, but if it's a routine response it's not acceptable."

Castor said Brooke Barnett, assistant to the president, played an important role in the process of bringing the issue to the university's attention.

"The administration has been very supportive," Castor said. "Even the police department has been very supportive. Chief Gantos said a written

mandate didn't exist before, because it was a common knowledge, but now there is an actual written mandate."

Barnett said Castor did an important service to the university by reporting and recording the specific times and places where the incidents took place.

"She (Castor) carefully documented times and places, and I assured her that this is not an Elon practice that we were aware and proud of," Barnett said. "We take it seriously, and this was clearly inappropriate."