

# Elon Volunteers! helps mentor Cummings High School students

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The graduation rate from Hugh M. Cummings High School — located in Burlington — is 67 percent, according to U.S. News and World Report.

**Hugh M. Cummings High School in Burlington is a Title I school, meaning there is a high percentage of students who get free or reduced lunch. U.S. News and World Report lists minority enrollment at 93 percent.**

Located in the eastern part of the city, its racial and socioeconomic statuses set it apart from the six other high schools in the area, but Elon University students are trying to make a difference.

Elon senior and Elon

Volunteers! Hugh M. Cummings High School LINC'S Program Coordinator Hanna Smith-Benjamin said the students rely on their teachers for an education, but don't have the help or resources they need to keep pursuing their education.

"A lot of these kids come to school and both their parents work maybe multiple jobs, and so they come to school to and hang out."

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Smith-Benjamin mentors roughly 20 10th grade English students at the high school.

"It's kind of a rambunctious class. They're very outgoing and loud," Smith-Benjamin said. "They're not always being pushed for college, but



Elon University students and their Cummings High School mentees find clothes during The Cinderella Project.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FACEBOOK

to pass their classes and to come to school?"

She provides more than homework help, inquiring about their social problems, too.

## Struggling for retention

Only two new volunteers from Elon — both freshmen — were recruited at the fall Organization Fair.

"It is hard to get more volunteers at Cummings rather than organizations like Boys and Girls Club or Positive Attitude Youth Center (PAYC) because they work with younger kids, and so it's a little less intimidating and a little easier to work with them," Smith-Benjamin said.

Because of the close ages, Smith-Benjamin says Cummings is a "hard community partner" to bring Elon students into, and volunteers have to be willing and open-minded.

"Most of these kids aren't at the levels that they should be. Or at the level that their grade is and even in this 10th grade English class, they're

doing drastically different things than I was," Smith-Benjamin said.

Students are working on their grammar, finding claims and reading short stories, not perfecting sentence structure and reading more complex literature like Smith-Benjamin said she did at her public high school in Arlington, Virginia.

The main goal for these students is to pass their standardized testing at the end of the year. Smith-Benjamin said that's why Elon students play a crucial part in mentoring these students, pushing them to succeed in their academics.

"It's been kind of a hard LINC'S project because I think a lot of people are scared of high schoolers," Smith-Benjamin said.

She added that it is "a little discouraging" to have so few volunteers from Elon.

"I want to do everything I can, but I am just one person," she said.

Heightening the retention rate of volunteers is also hard because Elon students are always changing their schedules. But The Cinderella

Project, another EV! program, has larger success rates for keeping Elon students engaged because they have only one workshop in the spring.

The Cinderella Project involves Elon students mentoring high school juniors and seniors on prom day.

"Mentoring for our program specifically is oriented toward young women empowerment," said junior Caroline Dean, The Cinderella Project Conference coordinator. "It's seeing that through women who have already been through the experiences that you've been through so they can help guide you through the difficulties of high school."

Elon students help the high schoolers pick out dresses, jewelry and shoes and find beauticians to do their hair and makeup for free at Elon. The volunteers provide transportation to campus and lead workshops on prom safety, bringing in SPARKS for peer education. And there's even an a cappella performance.

"I've seen the relationships and

bonds [that] come from this. And for me it's pretty phenomenal to see the community coming into our community and them interacting so fluidly," Dean said.

Compared to the Cummings LINC'S mentoring program, the Cinderella Project had 70 student volunteers show up to their first meeting this fall. Dean says about 80 percent of those students are freshmen.

She and Smith-Benjamin are both worried about freshmen volunteer retention.

This obstacle is difficult to overcome in Smith-Benjamin's eyes, but she said that she tries to foster her relationships, no matter how small the number.

## Keeping partnerships

Senior Ally Nysten, EV! executive director of communication education, said the relationship Elon and Burlington share at Cummings is beneficial for both communities.

"They anticipate Elon students coming out and volunteering," Nysten said. "And we invite them onto campus for other events to really strengthen that partnership."

For Nysten, mentoring is a mutually beneficial partnership, one that both Smith-Benjamin and Dean have experienced in distinct capacities.

Nysten said she sees that there is interest for people to get involved in organizations, but long-term commitment is hard, — especially since Elon students are often actively involved in many organizations. For now, the leaders are focusing on creating impactful change in their mentees and in themselves.

"I'm not afraid anymore to go out into our community," Dean said. "I feel very empowered getting to know these young women and knowing that they will be the young women that they continue to develop and love in this community. And in some way, I've been a part of that."

# Working for the same team

**Town of Elon Police, Elon University police share unique bond**

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The chaos in Columbus, Ohio, early Nov. 28 was a clear reminder to Town of Elon Police Chief Cliff Parker of why his staff and the Elon University Campus Safety and Police Department rely heavily on each other.

In the early stages of the Ohio State University attack that injured 11 according to various sources, both the university and Columbus police departments acted swiftly, throwing away jurisdiction requirements and working together to respond to the situation. Because of the severity of the incident, other agencies were called — including the FBI. Parker said if a similar

situation were to happen on Elon's campus, an identical approach would be taken.

"More than likely, if we were to get a call about an active shooter, there would be a response from multiple agencies," Parker said. "But if in terms of an initial response right here, we would absolutely respond to the campus to support the campus police and vice versa."

Parker admitted that an active shooter is a "worse-case scenario," but on a weekly basis, the Town of Elon and the university police willingly collaborate. Though the university police's jurisdiction is the campus and the Town of Elon's jurisdiction is the remainder of the town outside of campus, the two organizations share a radio and constantly assist each other on calls when officers are busy. During Homecoming weekend, multiple Town of Elon police reports said their deputies aided the university police because of the high rate of activity.

But while they both assist each other, they also respect each other

enough to carry out their jobs harmoniously. Because campus police work directly with the Office of Student Conduct,

**Even though Town of Elon police and Elon University police have had different goals, they still work together for the good of the community.**

privacy laws that can't be disseminated to anyone else.

Likewise, campus police normally wouldn't deal with minor domestic disputes or civil matters. Parker said because each department is accustomed to their distinctive groups — campus police being college students and Town of Elon Police being normally older adults — they will not overstep their boundaries. Ac-

ording to Parker, each department has its own goals and missions and neither want to interfere with that.

"We have different departments that we work in and our customer service tailored to our specific communities," he said.

With bigger crimes, if something involves both the town and the university, Parker said that they would work together after they find the common thread. The police chief used a stolen laptop as an example, saying that would be handled by campus police, but if something else was stolen in the town, detectives from both agencies would pitch in during the investigation.

"I call it 'force multiplication,' so that if our officers need assistance, we have immediate assistance from our partners, including for joint investigations," Parker said.

Parker said the relationship both organizations have is strong — something not common in other cities. He works closely with Elon's Director of Campus Safety and Police Chief Dennis Franks and has

meetings with him almost every week. Because of this, he thinks he and his staff are primed to continue working well with campus police because they get along.

"Their staff and our staff are friends," Parker said. "We know each other and we work with each other because we have common interests. Personally, I feel like the relationship we have is excellent. To be realistic, that's not going to be reflective across the country."

"They'll do what the law requires, but they don't have good personal relationships. In my opinion, that is not effective because you have to like each other in order to work well."

Sophomore Connor Quinn said he really appreciates having two police departments looking out for him because of the added sense of protection.

"I'd say it definitely adds an extra element of security knowing that along with campus police, the Town of Elon Police is right next door," Quinn said.