



Connie Book (fourth from left) smiles with Walter Cronkite (center) and other Elon faculty during Cronkite's visit to campus April 8, 2003. Book was an assistant professor of communications at the time.

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BOOK | from cover

Growing into a star

Having already spent six years working in higher education at Georgia College & State University, North Carolina State University and Meredith College, Book arrived at Elon in 1999 with vast experience. But almost instantly, she continued to grow her reputation. Many of her colleagues, including President Leo Lambert, took notice of her potential. He said it was her enthusiasm and attention to detail, among other things, that distinguished her.

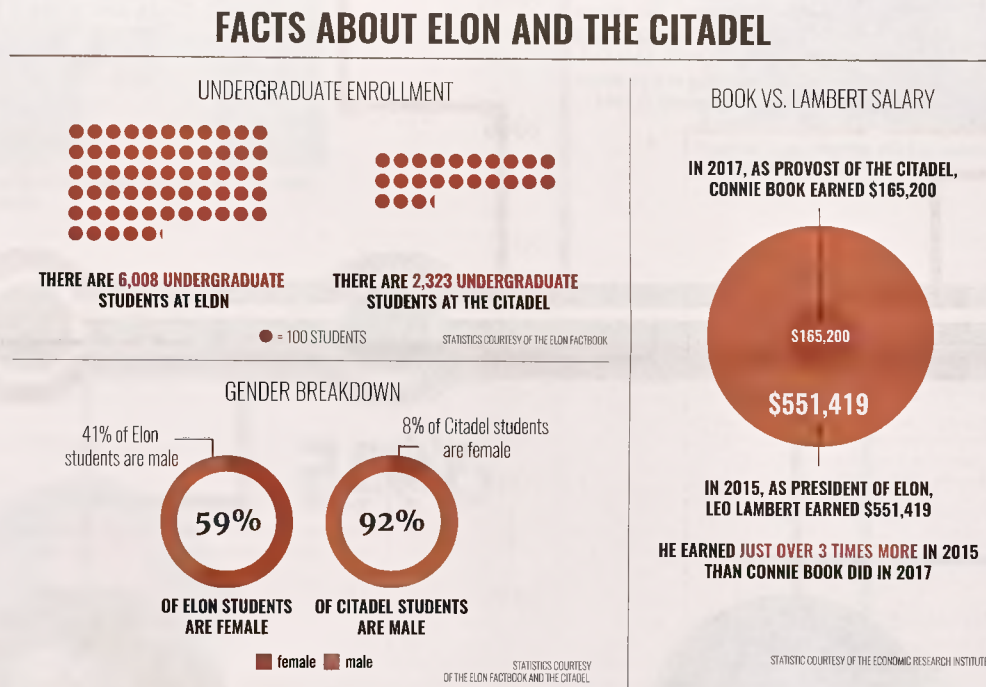
"Early on, she emerged as an incredible bright young talent," Lambert told Elon News Network. "She quickly rose through the ranks."

In 2004, she was promoted to associate dean of the School of Communications, where she originally started as an assistant professor. Then, the responsibilities expanded.

In 2008, Lambert tapped Book to join his senior staff as a faculty fellow, a program that gives promising faculty members a challenging task. Hers was to help craft the Elon Commitment strategic plan, a 10-year plan composed of eight themes for advancing the institution. Book said her leadership and collaborative instincts fully spiked during this 24-month process.

"That was the first time I worked on other units outside the School of Communications," Book told Elon News Network in an exclusive interview. "I was so excited. All the energy that people had here about excellence and prospering excellence was addictive. I wanted to do more."

In 2010, Book was named associate provost for academic affairs. In that role, she implanted programs that are still in tact today. She created the Student Professional Development Center and established the Elon in New York and Elon in Los Angeles programs. She also enhanced Elon's residential campus plans, and digital learning



and civic engagement initiatives. Yet while she constantly worked, she still cultivated personal relationships with students. One of them was Nneka Enurah '11, vice president of multiplatform content and partnerships at Authentic Entertainment in Los Angeles. She worked with Book in the School of Communications. And the thing she remembers most about Book is her passion about seeing students succeed.

"She's a true friend and a great mentor," Enurah said. "She thinks things through and she is really connected to us. She can really inspire a lot of people."

But while her tangible legacies at Elon were obvious, Book said she wanted another challenge.

In 2015, she became the first female provost and dean of The Citadel, a military college in Charleston, South Carolina. Her leadership roles at Elon weren't scripted — they were offered to her. But The Citadel presented an opportunity to hone her skills in a different setting. It was hard, she said, but she wanted to take a chance on herself.

"That was my first intentional move into a leadership role," Book said. "It was difficult, new and something I wanted to try. I was banking on that to help me grow and advance at that time."

The prodigal daughter

But almost three years later, Book set her eyes back on Elon.

At The Citadel, she continued her success as the second ranking administrator. New programs in cybersecurity, nursing, intelligence security, engineering and advanced STEM education launched under her watch. She also established an office of study abroad and undergraduate research. But when Lambert announced in February he'd be stepping down, the prospect of returning to Elon intrigued her. With her newly polished resume, she knew she'd be an attractive candidate for his successor.

"You find yourself in situation where opportunities open themselves up and you realize, 'Oh, I have the skillset necessary to do this, and fundamentally, I have the itch to

lead," Book said. "As a leader at The Citadel, I learned a different set of structure, a different set of policy and learned to value a different approach to leadership."

The vetting process was strenuous. Chaired by Trustee Wesley Elingburg, Elon's 16-member search committee embarked on an eight-month process. Initially, the committee solicited input from the public through open forums and surveys. Book received the most nominations, Elingburg said. But toward the summer months, the search closed as the committee collected a pool of more than 100 candidates. Elingburg said he wished the process was more open, but he suggested many of the candidates wanted to remain anonymous.

"It's what the market dictated," Elingburg said. "One of the things they asked for is confidentiality. They couldn't afford for their employer to find out about this or they would lose their job."

Kerrii Anderson, chair of the board of trustees and a member of the search committee, said Book stood out in

their meetings. The committee recruited active university provosts, presidents and people outside of academia. At the finalist stage, the committee opened the process to 60 Elon students, faculty, alumni and trustees.

"What impressed me the most were her leadership accomplishments," Anderson said. "She has a strong vision and a deep connection toward students. To me, it was imperative that we pick someone that embodies Elon's values. And to me, she fit the mold."

"It only took us 128 years to get our first women president, but I really wanted the best candidate and that was Connie."

Book was unanimously elected by the Board of Trustees. And when Lambert learned who his successor would be, he was ecstatic. He notified about 30 people before Elon publicly announced her selection. He heard nothing but great things.

"I don't think there is anyone happier than I am because I think it is a splendid choice," Lambert said. "I think she is going to be enor-

mously successful."

Building on her legacy

But the Elon that Book inherited from Lambert is different from when she left.

The Schar Convocation Center was just a thought — now it's almost complete. Every year, the size of the freshman class gradually increased. And with an influx of more people, ideologies clash.

Last spring, divisions throughout the student body became apparent — particularly with regard to matter of race and socioeconomics.

Fred Young, Elon's president from 1973-1998, said he doesn't know Book, though he's heard a lot about her. And while he believes in her, he doesn't have any advice. She has to address these problems in her own way, he said.

"My advice would be really out of date," he said. "The Elon I know has changed significantly since I was president."

Book said she's already thinking of her next initiatives. Chief among them is the next 10-year strategic plan, making Elon more financially accessible and building a more inclusive community. Lambert said she does have to start on these things immediately. Once the celebrations end, Book said she's ready to tackle these issues head on.

The risk she took on herself — like her father — ultimately paid off. When she was sitting in that cramped car, she never thought she would be a university president. And now that she is in this position, she said she wants to do everything she can to advance Elon forward.

"College campuses are complex places and a lot of it has to do with emerging ideas that challenge previous ideas," Book said. "We need to prepare our community for that. For me one the most critical aspects about the next vision is ensuring that the Elon experience is available to a broad spectrum of people and that we are able to effectively recruit and resource young people who desire an Elon education."