

WHERE DOES ELON STAND?

the good,
the bad
& the ugly

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Twenty years ago, if you told someone you attended Elon University, they would probably tilt their head, raise their eyebrows curiously and politely ask you where that was. Twenty years ago, Elon wasn't exactly on the radar. A lot has changed since then.

In 2001, Elon College became Elon University. Since then, it has gained numerous recognitions and awards, including the top spot on the U.S. News & World Report's list of Best Southern Regional Universities. As stated on Elon's website, Elon is one of only seven private universities in the nation with accredited schools of law, business, communications and education along with a Phi Beta Kappa chapter, which promotes the liberal arts and sciences. Elon has also been recognized by both Kiplinger's Personal Finance magazine and the Fiske Guide to Colleges as one of America's "best value" private institutions.

As many accolades as Elon has under its belt, an increase in recognition is bound to be met with an increase in criticism. Elon recently landed on The Daily Beast's list of colleges with the worst return on investment rankings. The list was created by comparing the starting and mid-career salaries of graduates to what they paid for tuition, and Elon placed seventh. However, the list was only comprised of institutions that successfully graduated at least 75 percent of undergrads within six years. Elon's six-year graduation rate was listed as 82.1 percent, and average starting salary was over \$43,000.

Every student, professor or faculty member can praise the university for its beauty. We have ample Instagram photos to prove it. As a botanical garden, Elon's campus has received plenty of notice as one of the most beautiful in the nation. One of the most common websites students cite as a source for the ranking, thebestcolleges.org, has had Elon at the top of the Most Beautiful list since 2011. But these sorts of rankings must be taken with a grain of salt, as a recent story by Elon Local News revealed that website is run for profit by one man, and no legitimate ranking methodology is used in composing the list.

Praises and criticisms are thrown left and right around campus. The second you hear something wonderful about the university, a

complaint can be heard not far in the distance. So where exactly do we stand with our image to outsiders? As Elon begins to gain recognition on a national scale, do individuals outside of the university see us as a bang-for-your-buck school or overpriced for what is offered? Are we the most beautiful campus in the nation, but lacking in important academic fields? At what cost are we becoming a more recognizable, small, private university?

WE'RE A SMART BUNCH.

Let us again rewind to about twenty years ago. If you were speaking to someone who *did* know of Elon, most likely a North Carolina resident, they might tell you it was a great place for average "B" and "C" students. This was a common stigma surrounding Elon back in the day. Not anymore.

"We're trying to establish Elon as a prestigious university," said Vice President of University Communications Dan Anderson. "I think the core message is that the style of learning is engaged learning. The quality of the programs is excellent."

Admissions statistics will support the notion that Elon no longer falls under the category of an ideal school for "B" students. The most recent admissions stats for the class of 2017 show an average SAT score of 1830 and GPA of 4.0. In addition, 87 percent of students complete internships, 47 percent participate in leadership programs, and 25 percent partake in undergraduate research.

It is evident that our student body is above average in academics, but what about the resources available to us in furthering our education? Grades and test scores only go so far without the proper tools to continue enhancing our knowledge and skills. How attuned is Elon to students' needs?

As far as our faculty goes, Anderson claims, "We have a world class faculty and staff." Our faculty is definitely qualified – of the 394 full-time faculty members at Elon, 88 percent have earned a Ph.D. Paul Parsons, dean of the School of Communications, agrees.

"I believe, because I've heard many students say so, they think we have a really good faculty here," Parsons said. "We have teachers who care about student learning."