

Elon University will join the Colonial Athletic Association for the 2014-15 academic year. The change in athletics conference affiliation was approved by the Elon Board of Trustees and announced May 23 by President Leo M. Lambert. "In a time of great change in the collegiate athletics landscape, the Colonial Athletic Association offers a great match with our strategic plans for Elon's future," Lambert said. "The CAA will allow our student-athletes to compete with peers at many excellent universities on the Eastern seaboard. We will have the opportunity to continue competition with fine schools in the Carolinas and Virginia while raising Elon's profile in the large metropolitan areas of the mid-Atlantic and Northeast – areas where many of our students, alumni and prospective students call home."

"The Colonial Athletic Association will provide the next great challenge in the growth of Elon athletics," said Dave Blank, director of athletics. "By emphasizing continuous improvement with our student-athletes and coaches, Elon has risen to a position of strength in SoCon competition. We are equally proud of the leadership Elon has provided in academic excellence in the conference. The CAA is a great fit at an exciting time in sports at Elon."

Blank said Elon will look to continue existing athletics rivalries and build new ones, especially with CAA members in the Carolinas and Virginia. "We look forward to continuing competition with former SoCon member College of Charleston and with UNC-Wilmington, and to expanding our schedules with competition against James Madison, Richmond and William & Mary, as well as with schools further north."

Elon will make the move to the CAA after more than a decade of success on the field and in the classroom in the Southern Conference. Elon has won 18 Southern Conference regular-season and tournament titles. Twelve Phoenix student-athletes have earned Southern Conference Player of the Year recognition, while Elon head coaches have earned 19 Southern Conference Coach of the Year honors. Nationally, 25 Elon student-athletes have received All-American honors and 25 student-athletes have earned Academic All-American recognition. Since joining the Southern Conference, 17 Elon teams and individuals have made NCAA postseason appearances, while teams and individuals have appeared in national rankings more than 20 times.

Wes Elingburg, chair of Elon's Board of Trustees, called the conference change historic. "Elon has a proud history of athletics success and we are excited to share Elon's story with new friends in the Colonial Athletic Association," Elingburg said. "This is an important next step in confirming Elon's position as a university of national prominence."

Colonial Athletic Association Commissioner Tom Yeager said the CAA is thrilled Elon has accepted the offer of membership.

"We have been selectively searching for highly respected institutions that share a common vision of institutional excellence and a commitment to the success of the young men and women participating in our athletic programs," Yeager said. "Elon fits our model and will immediately become a valuable conference partner helping to elevate each individual institution."

In fall 2013, the CAA will have nine full members in eight states:

- College of Charleston (Charleston, S.C.)
- University of Delaware (Newark, Del.)
- Drexel University (Philadelphia)
- Hofstra University (Hempstead, N.Y.)

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- James Madison University (Harrisonburg, Va.)
- Northeastern University (Boston)
- Towson University (Towson, Md.)
- University of North Carolina at Wilmington (Wilmington, N.C.)
- College of William & Mary (Williamsburg, Va.)

For football, four full CAA members are joined by seven football associate members:

Full members playing football

- University of Delaware (Newark, Del.)
- James Madison University (Harrisonburg, Va.)
- Towson University (Towson, Md.)
- College of William & Mary (Williamsburg, Va.)

Football associate members

- University of Albany (Albany, N.Y.)
- University of Maine (Orono, Maine)
- University of New Hampshire (Durham, N.H.)
- University of Rhode Island (Kingston, R.I.)
- University of Richmond (Richmond, Va.)
- Stony Brook University (Stony Brook, N.Y.)
- Villanova University (Villanova, Pa.)

The CAA geographic footprint provides an attractive match with Elon's student and alumni populations. Elon draws a large proportion of its enrollment from mid-Atlantic and New England states where many CAA teams are located. About 1,850 current students came to Elon from areas close to CAA member schools. Alumni populations in CAA cities are equally strong, with about 5,300 Elon alumni living within 50 miles of CAA member schools.

"We anticipate strong alumni support and exciting game-day outreach and events for Elon parents, graduates and prospective students who come to cheer on Elon at sports venues close to their homes," Lambert said. In competing in the CAA, Elon will gain valuable media exposure. The CAA recently signed a five-year agreement with NBC Sports Group, including the NBC Sports Network, which reaches 75 million homes nationwide. In addition, Comcast SportsNet provides regional broadcast coverage. The continuing CAA member institutions include four of the nation's top eight largest media markets. The number of television homes in the CAA market exceeds 20 million.

The CAA provides an excellent academic match for Elon, including 10 schools ranked as national universities by U.S. News & World Report. The conference consistently posts strong academic success ratings and has produced five Rhodes Scholars and 22 NCAA post-graduate scholars. The provosts of the member schools have formed the Colonial Academic Alliance, a consortium of CAA schools that collaborate on academic excellence, share academic benchmarks and information, sponsor an annual undergraduate research symposium and coordinate study abroad and student life programs.

The CAA was founded in 1979 as the ECAC South basketball league and was renamed the Colonial Athletic Association in 1985. The CAA began football competition in 2007. The CAA, which is headquartered in Richmond, Va., has a strong history of success:

All sports: The CAA has produced 16 national team champions in five different sports, 33 individual national champions, 12 national players of the year, 12 national coaches of the year and 12 Honda Award winners. During the 2011-12 academic year, 24 teams earned NCAA Tournament berths and 51 student-athletes received All-America honors in 16 different sports.

In addition, five CAA men's soccer teams were ranked in the top 60, and four women's soccer teams were ranked in the top 100.

Basketball: The CAA has had three teams make NCAA basketball Final Four appearances (Men: George Mason in 2006 and VCU in 2011; Women: Old Dominion in 1997). The NBA has drafted 21 CAA players, and 13 players have been drafted by WNBA teams. Over the past seven years, 65 men's and women's basketball teams have earned post-season berths.

Football: CAA Football, widely considered to be the best Football Championship Subdivision league in the nation, has produced four national champions in the past decade (Delaware, JMU, Richmond and Villanova). The CAA has had 21 consecutive seasons of multiple berths in the NCAA football playoffs. The conference has produced 6 Walter Payton Award winners and 6 Eddie Robinson National Coach of the Year winners. NFL teams have drafted 100 CAA players. Elon will continue to compete in the Southern Conference for the 2013-14 academic year, with the new women's lacrosse team holding its inaugural year of competition in the Atlantic Sun Conference before joining the CAA with other Elon sports in 2014. Blank said he looks forward to continuing Elon's close relationship with SoCon schools and to scheduling non-conference games with many of those schools in the future.

"We are proud of Elon's affiliation with the Southern Conference and we value the friendships we have forged with the member institutions," Blank said. "The SoCon era has positioned Elon well for continued growth in athletics, and we are grateful for the opportunities our student-athletes have had to associate with the schools of the Southern Conference."

Timeline of Elon athletics conference affiliations

1912 – Representatives from Elon, the University of North Carolina, Trinity University (Duke), Wake Forest, North Carolina A&M (North Carolina State University) and Guilford College meet in Raleigh to form a basketball league.

1930 – Elon becomes a charter member of the North State Conference.

1961 – The North State Conference changes its name to the Carolinas Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (Carolinas Conference).

1975 – Elon's football team moves into the newly formed South Atlantic Conference (SAC-8).

1989 – Elon leaves the North State Conference to join the South Atlantic Conference, which has become an all-sports league.

1993 – The South Atlantic Conference moves from NAIA competition to the NCAA Division II level.

1997 – Elon begins the transition to NCAA Division I play and membership in the Big South Conference.

1999 – Elon becomes an official NCAA Division I member of the Big South Conference.

2003 – Elon becomes an official member of the Southern Conference.

2014 – Elon will join the Colonial Athletic Association.