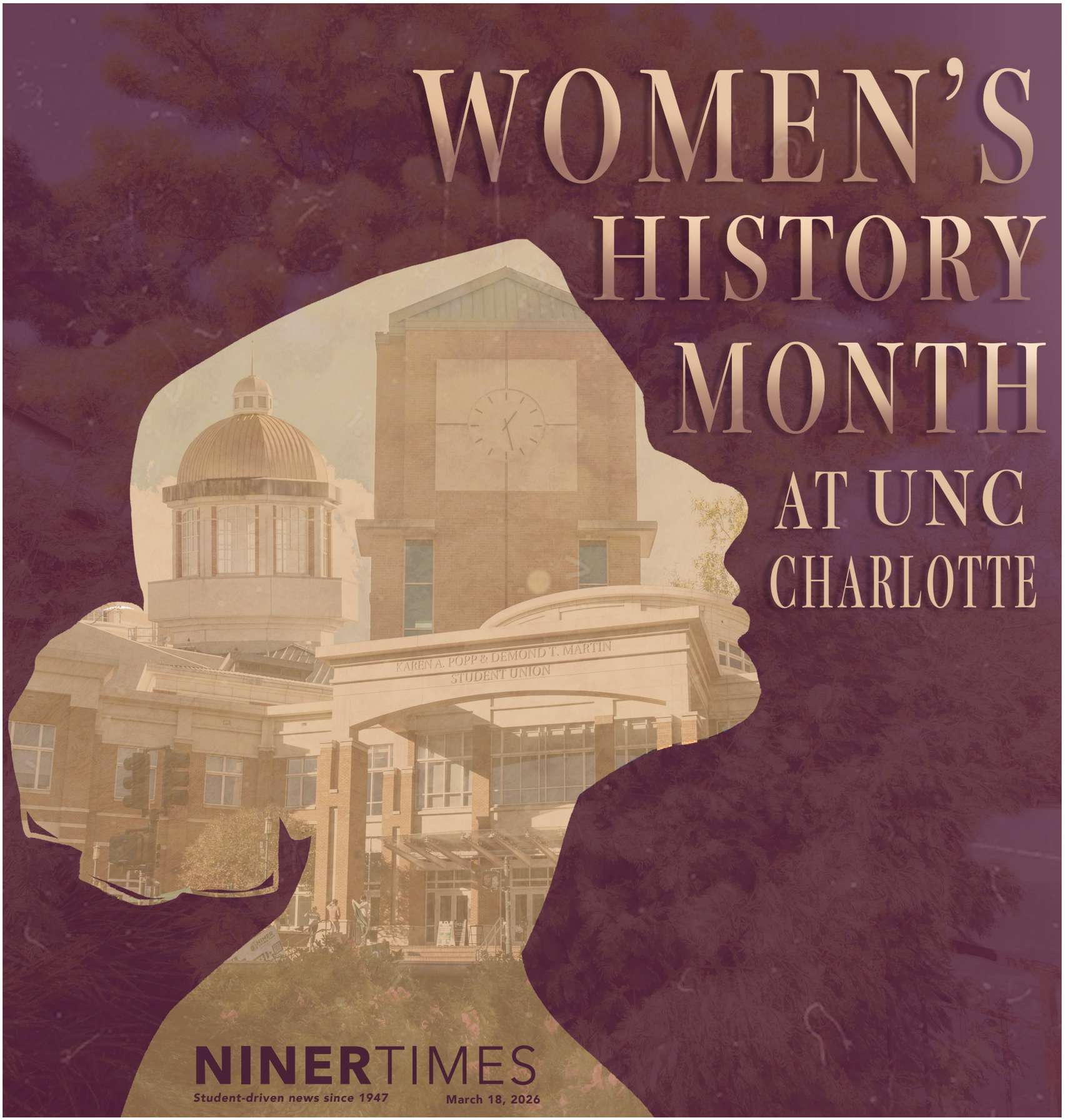
WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH AT UNC CHARLOTTE



NINERTIMES
Student-driven news since 1947
March 18, 2026

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CONTRIBUTING STAFF
Delaney Crowder, Blaise Uy, Caitlin Hanson, Shane Reese, Kyle Boucher, Noah Hughey, Hobart Jones, Benjamin Nowinowski, Cassandra Schilling, Jeremiah Carroll & Tanisha Sharma

LAYOUTS
Cover layout by Ava Weaver
Interior layouts by Ava Weaver, Megan Khor & Hana Arshad

MARKETING DIRECTOR
Madison Lewis
mktdirector@charlotte.edu

NINER MEDIA STAFF
Kelly Merges MEDIA ADVISER
Justin Paprocki MEDIA ADVISER
Laurie Cuddy BUSINESS MANAGER
Bianca Fruscello MARKETING COORDINATOR

The Niner Times is UNC Charlotte's student-run news publication founded in 1947 and has received both state and national recognition.

We cover campus happenings, news and events in the city of Charlotte and North Carolina and topics that are important to students.

CONTACT INFORMATION
9201 University City Blvd. SU 042
Charlotte, NC 28223
Phone: 704-687-7148
Email: editor@ninertimes.com



Rolando Vera/Niner Times

Events to watch for on and off campus

Track and Field 49er Classic
Charlotte, N.C.
March 19 - 21

CAB Madness
Belk Gym
March 20, 6 - 9 p.m.

2026 Under Construction
Rowe Arts Lab Theater
March 20 - 21, 7:30 p.m.

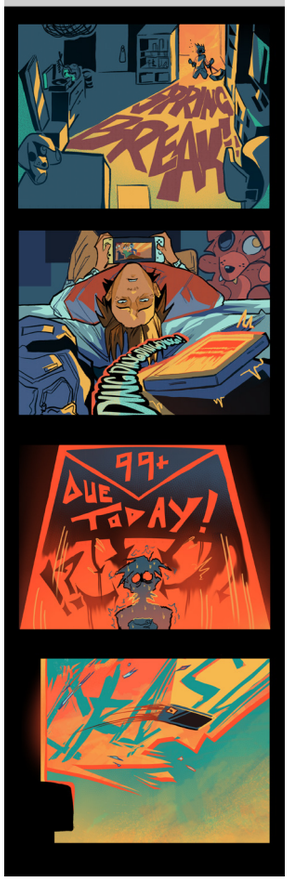
Women's Soccer v. Davidson
Charlotte, N.C.
March 21, noon

International Women's Day Celebration
Cone University Center, Lucas Room
March 24, 3:30 - 5 p.m.

Earth Day Festival
Belk Plaza
March 31, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Niner's Comics: Spring work

Caitlin Hanson | Staff Illustrator



NOTES FROM THE NEWSROOM:

Name a woman

Madeline Andrews | Arts & Culture Editor



There is a popular video series where a comedian walks up to people on the street with a microphone, asking them to "name a woman" for $1. As simple as the prompt sounds, people stutter, unable to recall anything from memory.

Even as a woman, I can be guilty of forgetting the fraught history of our suffrage in this country. But when you look into the near past, you'll find that the suffering is closer to you than you think.

My grandmother wasn't legally able to open a credit card until she was 25. It wasn't until the 1974 Equal Credit Opportunity Act that unmarried women were allowed an account without a male cosigner, which, until then, had created a huge barrier to women owning property.

Because of these societal shifts, I am the first woman in my family to live alone and to graduate from college, and I have those before me to thank for the opportunity.

So, in short, be aware of the immense opportunities afforded to you, and keep looking for ways to help the women behind you. And if someone asks you to name a woman, don't stutter.

Remembering Dannye Powell: The poet and journalist who helped shaped the city's voice

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor

On Sundays, Charlotte readers once turned to the book pages section of The Charlotte Observer newspaper to discover the writers shaping literature.

For nearly two decades, those pages were guided by poet and critic Dannye Powell, whose interviews and reviews helped bring the the South's literary voices to the city of Charlotte.

Powell's path to journalism began through poetry. Her first published poem appeared in The Paris Review in 1974, an achievement that caught the attention of editors at The Charlotte Observer and eventually led to her hiring as the paper's book editor.

Through her writing and her years as book editor at The Charlotte Observer, Powell connected readers with literature and championed the region's writers at a time when Southern storytelling was gaining national attention.

At the time, the Observer devoted two full pages every Sunday to books, a section that featured original reviews, author interviews and coverage of literary events across the region.

Powell held the role of editor from 1975 to 1992. Under her leadership, the section became a platform for both established and emerging voices.

Powell was best known for the interviews she conducted with prominent authors of the time, including Walker Percy, Maya Angelou and Eudora Welty. These conversations offered readers an intimate look at the ideas and experiences shaping Southern literature.

In the late 1990s, there was national attention on authors and writers from the South, as their work came to be known for exploring themes such as memory, family and race.

Powell's curiosity about writers and their creative lives eventually led her to compile many of those interviews into the 1995 book "Parting the Curtains: Interviews with Southern Writers."

The collection captured candid conversations with some of the South's most respected authors and offered readers a glimpse into the inspirations, struggles and philosophies behind their work.

For Powell, the interviews were not just journalistic assignments; they were opportunities to understand how writers shape the stories that define a region.

Prominent poetry

But Powell was not only chronicling literary voices. She was one herself.

Alongside her journalism, Powell built a career as an accomplished poet. Over the years, she published five collections of poetry.

Those collections were named: "At Every Wedding Someone Stays Home," "The Ecstasy of Regret," "A Necklace of Bees," "Nobody Calls Me Darling Anymore" and "In the Sunroom with Raymond Carver."

Two of these collections won the Brockman-Campbell Award, which is awarded to the best book of poetry in the state of North Carolina.

The honor highlighted Powell's standing within the state's literary community and underscored the lasting impact of her writing.

Her work often reflected a quiet attentiveness to the details of Southern landscapes and relationships, turning ordinary moments into reflections on time and identity.

Even as she reported on literature for a living, Powell remained deeply committed to the craft itself.

Her dual roles as journalist and poet allowed her to occupy a unique space in Charlotte's cultural life. As a book editor, she helped introduce readers to writers whose work might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

As a poet, she contributed to the region's own creative tradition.

During Powell's years at the Observer, Charlotte's literary scene was smaller and less visible than it is today. Independent bookstores, university programs and literary festivals that now anchor the city's cultural calendar were still developing.

In that environment, newspaper coverage played a critical role in connecting readers with authors and ideas.

Powell's Sunday book section became a hub for that conversation.

Through reviews and interviews, she spotlighted authors across genres while maintaining a particular focus on Southern writers. Those conversations reflected a South grappling with its history while also redefining itself through literature.

Even after leaving The Charlotte Observer in 1992, Powell's influence continued through her poetry and the relationships she built within the writing community.

In doing so, Powell contributed to a broader tradition of Southern poetry that values place, memory and voice. Her writing joined a group of regional storytellers who used literature to explore how personal histories intersect with larger cultural narratives.

Today, Charlotte's literary scene is far more expansive than it was when Powell first arrived at the Observer nearly five decades ago. But the foundation for that growth was built in part by writers, editors and advocates like her — people who believed that books deserved space in the public conversation.

Powell spent much of her career creating that space.

Powell passed away from breast cancer on Oct. 10, 2024, at the age of 83, but her legacy still lives on.

Through the pages of a newspaper and the lines of her poetry, she helped ensure that readers could encounter new ideas, new voices and new ways of understanding the world around them.

In the process, Powell left behind not only a body of work but also a legacy of literary curiosity, one that continues to echo through Charlotte's reading and writing community.



Caitlin Hanson/Niner Times

UNC Charlotte professor helps shape PBS children's show Phoebe & Jay

Cassandra Schilling | Staff Writer

Public Broadcasting Services (PBS's) new children's show Phoebe & Jay has Charlotte ties.

Kelly Cartwright, researcher, PBS advisor and UNC Charlotte Spangler Distinguished Professor of Early Child Literacy, is the show's lead curriculum advisor.

As Phoebe & Jay's lead curriculum advisor, Cartwright reviews episode scripts and collaborates with the show's creators to ensure the educational content is presented accurately and in a way that research shows works in teaching children.

Phoebe & Jay is about six-year-old fraternal boy-girl twins who live in Tobsy Towers, a fictional world with their father and grandmother.

The family just moved to the fictional town Nadaville, California, and each episode follows the twins as they embark on different adventures around their new apartment complex and city.

The children's show places significant emphasis on developing literacy skills.

This is primarily done by guiding viewers through reading everyday materials such as instruction manuals, addresses, directions and other similar texts.

Years in the making

Despite the show only releasing last month, Phoebe & Jay has been in the works for several years.

"It was fall 2021 when I first saw these kids [Phoebe & Jay]. So from that point, they pitched the premise and made a pilot. In the summer of 2022, the final plot episode was done, and we were celebrating that they were going to get to move to production," Cartwright said.

Since 2022 has Cartwright taken part in each step of the show's production

"I was involved every step of the way, reviewing to see: is the literacy represented in the way that we know research is saying it should be and how kids would interact with it, and is it sharing the concepts in a way that will help viewers understand and use those literacy things we're talking about?" Cartwright said.



Courtesy of Mainframe Studios and Phoebe & Jay Productions, PBS Kids & UNC Charlotte

In some animated shows, wall signs in the background or papers characters are writing on have scribbles instead of real words but this is not the case with Phoebe & Jay.

If the viewer pays attention, every poster, advertisement and other background detail, even ones that may be insignificant to the plot, has readable words.

"The main point of the show is to help kids understand the way that text functions in your everyday life," Cartwright explained. "But a lot of times, grown-ups are the ones using that text, right? It's not kids and kids don't even think it's for them, but seeing how we use text to accomplish certain goals, how that text works and helping the grown-ups who are watching with their children see how they can help their children identify and use that text."

With this type of incorporation, Cartwright shared that the goal is for lessons to be woven in such a way that kids don't even realize they are learning.

This learning also takes place in an "authentic" environment, Cartwright said, pointing to the show's diversity and representation.

"We [will] have a blind character and a deaf character and one that uses a wheelchair, we need to represent all of that appropriately," Cartwright said, adding that the show has advisors on set providing guidance on how to do so.

Six years with PBS

Advising on Phoebe & Jay is not Cartwright's first time working with PBS.

She has served as an advisor to the network since 2020. Working with PBS, Cartwright is guided by frameworks that help guide the content being produced for children.

One of these frameworks is literacy-based, and the other revolves around executive functioning skills.

Cartwright was invited by PBS to advise on both of these areas.

Executive functioning skills include working memory, emotional regulation, self-control, flexibility and more.

Cartwright emphasized how they underlie everything we do or don't do.

While Phoebe & Jay has a significant focus on helping kids develop their literacy, the show also focuses on developing these skills.

"The creators, Genie and Thy, are amazing people and work beautifully together and their vision for weaving everyday literacy content into this really cool neighborhood context with a community that supports one another — it ends up showing children not just how literacy is woven into their everyday life but also how to use those important thinking skills, those executive function skills, to use those literacy tools in their world," Cartwright said.

The creators of Phoebe & Jay, Genie Deez and Thy Than, are people the professor has worked closely with over the past few years.

Cartwright, already an advisor for PBS, collaborated with the show's creators on different pilot episode concepts.

They worked well together, so Deez and Than personally invited Cartwright to be the lead curriculum advisor on Phoebe & Jay.

That collaboration was virtual until November 2025, when the trio got to meet in person to present on a panel about Phoebe & Jay for the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Federal funding cuts

PBS used to be funded by the federal Ready to Learn grant which was terminated in May 2025.

As a result, Phoebe & Jay is the last PBS children's show to receive federal funding for production, and the creators had to work through unforeseen funding gaps.

They, of course, worked it out, but Cartwright worries about the general consequences of the termination of the Ready to Learn grant.

"It is concerning for the future of educational television in the public sphere that has brought literacy to so many people. Where will that come from? Who will fund that?" she said.

It's unclear whether the funding that could sustain Phoebe & Jay will return to PBS. New government leadership and spending packages could provide new hope for PBS and Cartwright's program.

Still, that hope hasn't arrived and the future of Phoebe & Jay lies in uncertainty. What will remain, whether funding is delivered or not, is the enriching impact of Phoebe & Jay and Cartwright's guidance.

The 2 women behind UNC Charlotte's rise from a high school classroom to over 30,000 students



Kyle Boucher | Staff Writer
Courtesy of UNC Charlotte

From a small office in a local high school in 1946 to more than 30,000 students 80 years later, UNC Charlotte's growth traces back to two women: Bonnie Ethel Cone and Mary Rebecca Denny.

UNC Charlotte's origins stem from an influx of demand for higher education after World War II. Hundreds of veterans returned home to the Charlotte area seeking opportunities to further their careers post-war.

With such a sudden surge in incoming college students, universities across North Carolina were admitting more students than they could handle. In response, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill created several temporary branches across the state to help expand access to higher education.

One of these branches was the Charlotte Center, which would later become UNC Charlotte thanks to the efforts of these two women.

Cone lays the groundwork

Bonnie E. Cone got her Master of Arts in Mathematics from Duke University in 1941 and an honorary Doctorate of Humanities from Davidson College in 1961.

She led a versatile career, from teaching mathematics to Navy soldiers during World War II to working as a statistical analyst at the Naval Ordnance Laboratory in Washington, D.C.

However, the role she held for most of her career was director of the Charlotte Center, which was originally set up in Charlotte Central High School in 1946.

When Cone began her new position as director, she worked out of a tiny office, which people often referred to as a "lost and found area."

It had a single desk with no drawers, one filing cabinet and an old typewriter. With this setup, Cone was tasked with organizing education for nearly 300 incoming first-year students.

Because the Charlotte Center was operating out of a high school, classes could only take place in the evening, which made hiring new staff difficult.

Very few teachers wanted to work late hours, and finding educators who could teach at a college level made the task more difficult.

However, Cone eventually managed to hire her first full-time professor, Mary Denny.

Denny joins the Charlotte Center

Denny began her career teaching English at a handful of public schools across eastern North Carolina, before getting her master's from Duke University and becoming an English professor at Queens College, which is now called Queens University.

When Denny joined the Charlotte Center in 1946, she left her job at Queens University. Cone acknowledged it was a career risk, as the Charlotte Center was not meant to operate long-term.

Many people told Denny that she would be out of a job by the end of the year, but she chose to work at Charlotte regardless.

Denny did this because, like many educators in Charlotte at that time, she felt that the largest city in North Carolina should have its own large university. She believed that the Charlotte Center had the potential to become such an institution.

While teaching classes, Denny helped Cone as a curriculum advisor and created course catalogs for various programs.

After operating for three years, the Charlotte Center became a two-year community college in 1949, renamed Charlotte College. Since Charlotte was then considered a private university, it could not directly get state funding.

For this reason, Cone worked with Elmer H. Garinger, superintendent of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, to begin the construction of a separate campus under the funding of the local public education district.

This new campus was built not far from downtown and is where modern-day UNC Charlotte now stands.

At the time, Charlotte College needed to expand its scope of operations and organize different departments, one of the first being the English department.

As Charlotte College shifted into being a two-year university, Denny worked with Cone to build the English department in a way that left room for future growth.

Denny became the director of this new department and acted as an advisor on how other departments should be structured.

During this time, Denny also worked with Cone to create Charlotte's college catalog, which outlined the courses offered at Charlotte in addition to its rules and regulations. Denny also created what would become the Niner Times and Nova, Charlotte's literary magazine.

The professional relationship

Cone and Denny appeared to have a positive relationship. In an audio interview, Cone said the two women shared a dream that Charlotte College would one day become a large public university that could accommodate thousands of students.

In a video where Cone spoke to students about the history of Charlotte's founding, she described Denny as a "tremendous friend." She appreciated Denny's encouragement and found inspiration in Denny's strong will to make Charlotte into a growing university.

Cone shared how meaningful it was to her that Denny frequently offered to help in any way she could. Cone also talked about how Denny always stayed behind after class to speak with students or help with their publications and other writing.

The two women collaborated for nearly two decades, accomplishing several major feats for Charlotte during that time.

Making the dream come true

In 1965, the North Carolina House of Representatives passed a bill to turn Charlotte College into the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, joining the UNC System as a member institution.

Denny retired in 1964; she had worked as the English department head for 15 years. However, she continued to work on Charlotte's Curriculum Committee even after retirement.

In 1970, the Denny building was named after her in honor of all she did for Charlotte.

Cone retired in 1973 and had the Bonnie E. Cone University Center named in her honor. Cone continued to support Charlotte well into her retirement; even in her '90s, she attended Charlotte's sports events and ceremonies.

She worked with the UNC Charlotte Foundation, a nonprofit organization that helps Charlotte achieve its educational goals by raising funds for student scholarships, faculty research, academic programs and campus development.

Denny and Cone spent the rest of their lives supporting Charlotte's growth and left lasting impacts on many students during their years of teaching.

One Charlotte student's dedication to promoting local shows across N.C.

Tanisha Sharma | Staff Writer

Twenty hours running an Instagram page. Fourteen hours of classes. Add in a few extra hours for late-night drives back to campus from punk shows.

Even without a calculator, first-year student Ayslee Pilkenton knows the math doesn't quite add up.

When asked how much time she has to doom-scroll on Instagram Reels, her answer is simple: barely any.

This is because all her time goes towards her major, mechanical engineering, or her rapidly growing Instagram account dedicated to promoting local alternative and punk shows in North Carolina.

The account @nc.scene currently has over 7,500 followers and has been growing steadily, adding approximately 1,000 new followers per month. Pilkenton's account began with the goal of simply sharing posts of local shows with close friends, but has since grown into a collection of band interviews, resources, music recommendations and music release writeups.

Her one-woman operation takes time. She spends over 20 hours on her page weekly. Separately, her coursework runs long on weekdays, where she has a 14-credit-hour schedule but spends even more time studying. However, one thing remains certain: she genuinely loves both.

"It's such a juxtaposition between getting home from a show like three hours away at 2 a.m. and then going to my 8:30 a.m. [class] the next morning," Pilkenton said.

Her trick to avoiding burnout? More shows.

"Honestly, every time I feel overwhelmed with [@nc.scene], I'm like, I just need to go to a show and talk to my friends and dance — I'm feeling overwhelmed because I'm not actually experiencing music. So I just go out, I go to a show with my friends, I look stupid and I dance, and it is beautiful."



Courtesy of Ayslee Pilkenton

The scene

Many people argue over the true meaning of 'punk,' but in general, one word can describe its ethos: anti-authoritarian. The local Charlotte punk scene reflects this through its shows that emphasize the importance of free expression. This scene is attracting students from UNC Charlotte as the inexpensive shows are only minutes away from campus.

Charlotte is home to hundreds of bands of all genres. Apart from the main venues, there are other venues all around. Whether located in a strip mall, at a Peruvian restaurant or in a random parents' kitchen, Charlotte's local bands have infiltrated the nooks and crannies of nearby neighborhoods. With what feels like ever-rising costs, people are struggling to find the room in their wallets for more expensive shows. Local shows give people a way to enjoy live music without worrying about checking their bank accounts the next morning.

With Pilkenton's account, bands are able to receive the recognition from an increased amount of donations and eyes on them to continue playing for the community.

These shows also provide recognition for not only their bands, but also various worldly causes. Pilkenton's favorite

show occurred in Wilmington, N.C.: "Save the Sharks: A Charity Festival for Marine Conservation." This mixed bill lineup raised over $2,000 for the Marine Conservation Institute.

Pilkenton's origin

Pilkenton's connection to the scene didn't begin in Charlotte. Instead, it started in spaces like car rides to school.

"My mom really got me into punk and Riot Grrrl when I was three. I would be like six years old, on the way to school, when she was blasting Bikini Kill," Pilkenton said.

Pilkenton progressively grew more into various forms of emo music, and it was in her early years of high school when she discovered her love for local music, beginning with a band named Blankstate.

She began going to shows with her cousin, Landon, and that is where she decided to fill the musical resource void. Landon is now a part of the three-member band, Tristinza. This only fires her passion to attend more shows and to help other bands grow.

This became the reason for Pilkenton's page: to be a connector to new and local music.

"I just want people who want to be able to get involved in the scene, but can't or don't know how to, to be able to find their spot," Pilkenton said.

Behind @nc.scene

Pilkenton spends hours combing through Instagram stories, local releases, messages and band pages to make sure she doesn't miss a show. Because she follows nearly 2,500 accounts, the process continues daily, with temporary Instagram stories only having a 24-hour viewing limit.

On top of this, she edits and creates the posts herself, transcribes interviews and is creating a magazine inspired by her page.

As the page has grown, so have the expectations of bands and venues hoping to have their show promoted.

"If I take one day off posting on the account, I have like 20 DMs."

On top of this, she has to have a list of bands that she chooses not to post about for a variety of reasons, inwcluding those holding allegations of misconduct and bands that improperly use AI for content.

What the account brings

Pilkenton runs her account so that others can enjoy shows and connections the way she has, and to help each other find their spot in a fulfilling community.

This message does not go unread, as several individuals have gotten the chance to thank her in real life and through her page.

One attendee had a memorable conversation with Pilkenton, thanking her for spreading shows that were accessible to everyone.

For Pilkenton, one goal remains simple: to help others find their place in the scene that helped her find hers.



Tracking the cultural legacy of Charlotte's skateparks

Jeremiah Carroll | Staff Writer



Wes Packham/Niner Times

Charlotte is known for its vibrant and growing art scene. Places like North Davidson (NoDa) and Camp North End serve as vibrant hubs for individuals dedicated to creating their own art without restrictions.

NoDa and Camp North End provide innovative community-driven spaces for artists and for Charlotte's skate community. Understanding the history of Charlotte's skateparks reveals how this enjoyable and expressive activity fosters a community that sets a positive example.

Eastland Skatepark

While Charlotte's skaters have created their own spaces, ongoing tensions with city priorities — particularly economic growth proposals and rapid development — have led to the closure of many established skate areas. One notable example is the Eastland DIY Skatepark, a cultural landmark that was demolished to make way for redevelopment projects like mixed-use hubs and the Charlotte Football Club (CLTFC) headquarters.

Skating rarely receives the same level of support from the city. Skate culture is characterized by creativity, rebellion and freedom, with an emphasis on individuality for the next generation of skaters to roll with.

Eastland Skatepark was founded in August 2015 by local skaters on the site of the former Eastland Mall in Charlotte. It began as a small concrete box in a vacant area, where about half a dozen skaters could enjoy skating without any restrictions. This was their space — a place to express themselves freely and without rules.

Gradually, more and more people showed up as they too wanted to find a place to skate.

As time went on, the demand for renovations of Eastland grew, leading to significant expansion in the community.

For about seven years, the community began to expand Eastland around Central Avenue and Albemarle Road, building pipes, ledges and ramps. Over time, the renovations improved the skatepark and brought the community together. The park, which covered nearly 29 acres of open land, featured a variety of skateboarding structures in different sizes, both large and small. Gradually, the park gained recognition as a public space where people could host events, parties and gatherings, all while enjoying their time skating.

Eastland was recognized as one of the top skateparks on the East Coast, particularly in North Carolina, due to its vast area. This achievement highlights the immense popularity of Eastland Skatepark, making it a favored location among skaters.

The community wasn't always limited to just skaters within the park. There had been countless events hosted at Eastland, along with their cultural hubs for artists.

In 2021, a "Girls, Gays and Theys" skatejam was held in hopes of expanding the community from its primarily male audience to the LGBTQ+ and female audiences. The event fostered growth within the skateboarding community by opening up more events to cater to larger audiences and groups.

The skatepark provided artists with an outlet to express themselves and amplify their voices through various messages. This created a supportive environment for skaters belonging to minority ethnic groups and LGBTQ+ skaters. Throughout Eastland, messages like "Trans Lives Matter" and "Black Lives Matter" were consistently shared within these cultural hubs, reinforcing their unity.

Creative freedom lost to urban development

As Eastland grew, rules and regulations started setting in, a foreign concern for many skaters. Some rules, such as always wearing padding or limiting skating areas, didn't land with skaters at all. Their general beliefs are based on expression and unity. For many,

skating can be seen as a way to relieve stress or to express themselves through different styles and skateboard tricks.

Unfortunately, that outlet would be no more as Charlotte began to see that the deconstruction of Eastland would benefit their plans of continued development.

In early 2022, Eastland Skatepark was demolished when the city realized the area's worth for mixed-use hubs. In addition, plans to construct the headquarters for CLTFC brought the total budget to about $26 million. This amount is nearly twice the size of Eastland's budget, estimated at around $15 million, which is funded by the skater's personal contributions.

This enraged skaters across the city of Charlotte, who once deemed the skatepark as an outlet for many. Dedication was on display amongst the community, as they poured money from their own pockets to fund and expand the skatepark with many different railings, ramps and more.

A petition was created with 10,000 signatures, with members of the skate community speaking out at multiple city council meetings, advocating for Eastland not to be demolished for hubs that had been expanding Charlotte for quite some time. Something they truly believed in was about to be taken away by the government of Charlotte.

Grayson Skatepark: inauthentic compared to Eastland

Efforts to keep Eastland failed, however, and after its deconstruction, Charlotte opened a new skatepark called Grayson Skatepark, aiming to attract skaters from Eastland and rebuild. However, this decision upset many skaters. The strict rules, structured design and other elements detracted from skater culture, making it feel more corporate than authentic.

Concerns emerged almost immediately. For starters, many Eastland skaters pointed out the pricing to enter the park. To skate, adults who are residents of Mecklenburg County must pay $5, while children cost $2. For non-residents, the cost is $8 for adults and $5 for children. The skatepark's hours were also inconsistent throughout the week.

Many also criticized the skatepark's design. The feature lacked the creative and hand-built character that Eastland had, and the mandatory padding rules reinforced the sense of restriction. To longtime Eastland skaters, Grayson felt like more of a regulated facility rather than a community space. Many described the park as promoting conformity rather than creativity, a shift that left them feeling disconnected from a culture that once thrived on freedom and individuality.

The Eastland skaters tried their best to recreate that feeling within different locations, like on Matheson Avenue or near Double Oaks High School. Unfortunately, both sites were removed for the same reason as Eastland. The only skatepark accessible remained Grayson Skatepark, as a sign of defeat amongst the Eastland skaters.

Yet the community refused to disappear. Former Eastland skaters came together to form what is now the Charlotte Skate Foundation (CSF), a nonprofit dedicated to advocating and preserving the spirit of DIY skating in the city. The group soon secured a new location to build a community-driven skatepark, aiming to restore the definition of skate culture and the creativity that characterized Eastland.

Kilborne Skatepark reignites expression

The new location is named Kilborne DIY Skatepark. Acting as another hub like the original Eastland, many skaters in Charlotte grew fond of the new area, ditching the corporate aspect of Grayson and embracing the space that once again reflected their culture. Many people began to contribute to the skatepark and also fund the CSF, adding more rails, ramps and other skate accessories to bring Kilborne to life.

Charlotte had seen the drive and labor the Eastland skaters and the CSF had been putting into bringing back skater culture and preserving Eastland's spirit at Kilborne, rewarding them with a $15,000 grant. The foundation later stated that they planned on expanding to more sites in Charlotte, with the mission of not only continuing to advocate for DIY parks to remain open, but also expanding and solidifying skater culture for future generations.

As Kilborne continues to grow, skate culture over time has not only strengthened core beliefs but also created new meaning amongst newer skaters. Specifically near UNC Charlotte, two skaters on campus reflected on what the community represents today and how Eastland's legacy still influences their experiences.

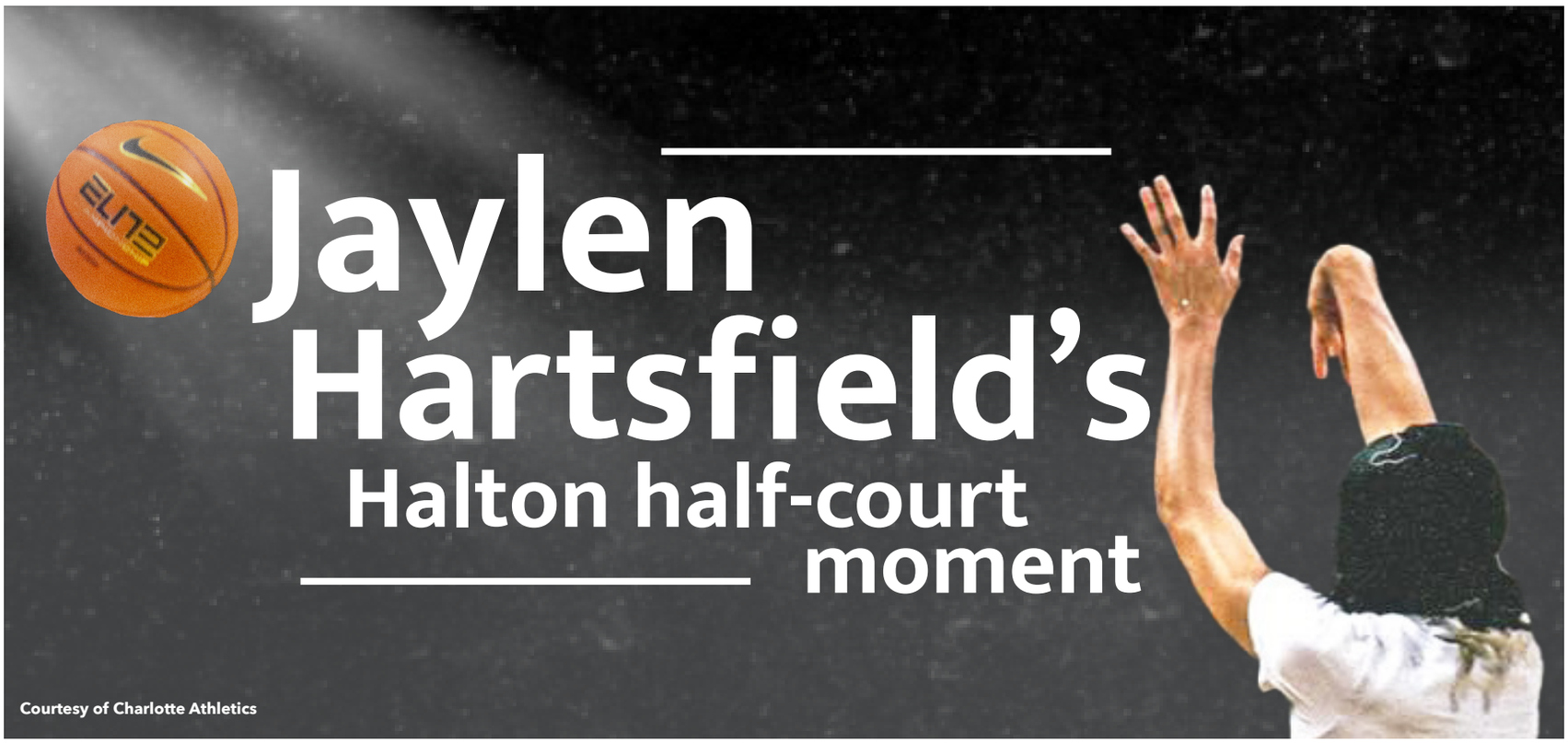
"The beauty of skateparks is the art, too. It was let out to be a place of expression, and I think that's the most important thing," first-year student Samah Hunter said. "I think the future of skating is positive, especially with social media, like TikTok and stuff like that."

The rise of social media has made it possible for anyone to share content about skateboarding, raise awareness about DIY skate areas and discover new tricks online. This expansion of the skateboarding community allows people to explore various aspects of skate culture through the lens of its members.

"Skating was kind of all about hardship, it's not easy to become good at skating because you're gonna fall so many times, and it's gonna hurt," first-year student Sam Fielden said. "I think it's important to protect public spaces and what we have as skaters. It's hard to build skateparks, and nine times out of 10, cities don't really want to fund them."

With the history of Eastland Skatepark comes a story of how a small patch of concrete, once used by a handful of skaters, grew into a community that welcomed hundreds. A vacant lot evolved into a space that cultivated an accepting culture built on unity, hardship, creativity and shared identity. Eastland Skatepark shaped the core beliefs of Charlotte skate culture and affirmed skating as a form of art, one defined not by rules but by the personal meanings each skater brings to it.





Jaylen Hartsfield's Halton half-court moment

Courtesy of Charlotte Athletics

Evan Campos | Sports Editor

The night of Feb. 25 will remain one UNC Charlotte fourth-year Jaylen Hartsfield remembers for the rest of his life.

During a stoppage in play in Charlotte men's basketball's matchup against the University of North Texas, Hartsfield stepped onto the Halton Arena floor with a chance to win free tuition.

The criminal justice major had two attempts from half-court. His first shot missed, but the second dropped through the net, sending the crowd inside Halton into a frenzy.

"Most people would have freaked out after, but honestly, in that moment, I prayed about it," Hartsfield said. "And when it went in, it was an answered prayer for me."

Now in his fourth year at Charlotte, the Raleigh, N.C. native suddenly found himself at the center of one of the most memorable in-arena moments in recent Charlotte men's basketball history. The half-court shot secured Hartsfield an entire year of tuition.

"Honestly, it has just been a blessing. [It's] just a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," Hartsfield said.

Getting his chance

Hartsfield first learned about the opportunity the same way many students hear about campus events — through an email.

While sitting in class, he noticed a digital game flyer advertising a chance to attempt a half-court shot for a full year of tuition. He signed up without thinking much of it at the time.

Weeks passed before he heard anything back. Then, on the day of Charlotte's game against North Texas, he received a call informing him that he had been selected to take the potentially life-changing shot.

Later that evening, Hartsfield walked onto the Halton Arena floor without practicing the attempt at all, relying instead on his basketball background and self-belief in his ability.

He played both junior varsity and varsity basketball at Wakefield High School and spent much of his childhood around the game. Even now, he still plays pickup games at UNC Charlotte's student recreation centers.

Those years around his favorite sport steadied him as he stood near half-court in front of thousands of fans. Years of playing in front of crowds meant the stage felt somewhat overwhelming, but not unfamiliar.

"Leading up to the shot, I was honestly pretty confident I could probably hit it," Hartsfield said.

When the ball fell through the net on his second attempt, the realization did not immediately set in.

"When I got back to my seat, I was still kind of shaking, really did not process it till I sat down," Hartsfield said.

While Hartsfield was still taking it all in, the reaction around him began almost immediately.

Going viral

Hartsfield's friends in the arena flooded his phone with texts after the shot, while another friend captured the moment on video. WCNC Sports Director Nick Carboni also captured the shot, and those clips quickly spread across social media and around campus.

When Hartsfield told his parents what had happened, their reaction stood out the most.

"I told my parents, and they were crying," he said.

In the days that followed, students around campus began recognizing him from the video and offering congratulations.

"It has been different honestly. It has been nice just seeing the support I have been getting on campus," Hartsfield said. "It is amazing what one shot can do for you. Seeing myself on the news and things like that, I really cannot put it into words, it is just so crazy."

Hartsfield has embraced the moment fully, often going back to watch the shot again.

"I have watched it about a hundred times," he said.

Now in his first semester as a fourth-year, the half-court shot carries an impact far beyond a viral highlight. Charlotte Athletics will cover the cost of his entire final year at the University.

"It helps out in more ways than you can imagine, especially with how expensive school is these days," Hartsfield said.

A lasting shot

Throughout his time at Charlotte, Hartsfield had been a casual supporter of the University's athletic teams, attending football and basketball games occasionally like many students on campus. Now, after the moment that changed his year, that interest has grown significantly.

"I will definitely be going to more basketball games, just out of interest," Hartsfield said.

After taking time to process everything that happened, Hartsfield said the weeks following the shot have been "definitely, by far" some of his favorite weeks on campus. He added that the night became his favorite moment of his college experience.

It is a reminder of what one shot can do — turning a brief stoppage in a basketball game into an unforgettable moment Hartsfield and his family will cherish long after his time at Charlotte.

Pinky's promise: Chaisilprungruang's path to prominence at Charlotte

Benjamin Nowinowski | Staff Writer

Throughout the history of Charlotte women's golf, few players have built as impressive a résumé or found as much success as sophomore Pinky Chaisilprungruang.

Since joining the team in 2024, Chaisilprungruang has claimed three individual No. 1 finishes with Charlotte, along with a win at the 2025 Southwestern Amateur Championship. She has recorded 14 top-10 finishes, including seven in the top five, and has been named American Conference Golfer of the Month three times.

She also set Charlotte's record for the lowest tournament round and earned a spot on the 2025 ANNIKA Award watchlist and the Women's Golf Coaches Association All-American Honorable Mention Team — all in just two seasons.

Despite those accolades, one of Chaisilprungruang's greatest strengths remains her bright personality. The ability to stay level-headed and focus on the task — or shot — at hand separates the best golfers from the rest of the field, and few embody that mindset better than Chaisilprungruang.

With her second season coming to an end, Chaisilprungruang reflected on the memories, successes and lessons she has experienced since arriving at Charlotte.

Finding a home away from home

Before coming to Charlotte, Chaisilprungruang was raised in Phitsanulok, Thailand, where her love of golf began. She said her father first took her to a local golf course when she was three years old, where she quickly fell in love with the sport.

She began competing at six years old and later traveled to the United States for the first time to compete in a junior tournament. Success soon followed in Thailand, where she was named to the Thailand national junior golf team in 2021 and later claimed two wins and a top-five finish in the TKG IPGA Championship series before committing to Charlotte.

After a marathon journey across the world — including stops in Dubai and Washington, D.C. — Chaisilprungruang finally arrived in North Carolina.

When she first arrived in the Queen City, Chaisilprungruang described the experience as a "culture shock."

"Food, people and how we manage time — everything's just so different, but I had my coaches and my teammates. They helped me and were there for me, and I was able to adapt to the culture," Chaisilprungruang said.

Despite moving far from her native country, Chaisilprungruang quickly found familiarity at Charlotte alongside fellow Thai teammates. Junior Wawa Booncharn also came to Charlotte from Thailand, while sophomore BB Rujiranan's family moved to North Carolina from Thailand.

Chaisilprungruang described her bond with Booncharn and Rujiranan as "inseparable," saying their shared background helped make Charlotte feel more like home.

Defining success

Since arriving at Charlotte, one of Chaisilprungruang's biggest accomplishments has been her rise in the World Amateur Golf Rankings. At the time of publishing, she ranks No. 79 in the world among amateur female golfers.

Reflecting on that recognition, Chaisilprungruang credited the support she has received from her teammates, coaches and the Charlotte Athletics community.

"I'm happy because I get to represent Charlotte," she said with a smile. "The donors have supported me so much that I would want to give something back to them and to Charlotte."

She also highlighted members of Charlotte's performance staff who have played an important role in her development.

"My athletic trainer Zach Brown, my workout trainer Jason Lindsay. He is the best. I've gotten so much stronger because of him."

Adjustments to her playing style have also played a key role in her success since arriving at Charlotte.

In golf, players often approach a round either aggressively — attacking every pin regardless of risk — or strategically, choosing safer shots and attacking only when the odds favor success.

"I was a very aggressive player," she said. "I would go for every single pin out there. So my coach told me, 'Pinky, you can be aggressive when you want to be, but sometimes you need to play smart.'"

Following that shift in approach, her global ranking climbed from No. 246 the week before her first tournament with Charlotte to a career-high No. 70.

Playing with perspective

In speaking with Chaisilprungruang, her pride in representing Charlotte and appreciation for the women's golf team quickly become clear.

When discussing her goals, her answer reflected the positive outlook that defines her personality.

"Right now, I just want to play, have fun and love life," Chaisilprungruang said.

Some of her favorite memories, she said, came during moments when the team supported each other the most.

"My favorite moments with the team are times when I'm not at my peak," she said. "I feel like the most important thing about life is having someone there for you when you're at your lowest."

When offering advice to aspiring golfers, Chaisilprungruang emphasized the importance of sportsmanship.

"If you're playing in a match and you lose to someone, it's best to congratulate your opponents because you're not going to win every time, and that's golf," Chaisilprungruang said.

At a level where winning often becomes the sole focus, Chaisilprungruang brings a refreshingly positive perspective to the game.

While her skill sets her apart on the course, her joy for the game and positive outlook — win or lose — are what make her a fan favorite and a standout member of Charlotte women's golf.



Courtesy of Charlotte Athletics

Women in Sports Society makes space for future leaders in athletics

Shane Reese | Staff Writer

Courtesy of Women in Sports Society

Throughout sports history, women in sports have been underrepresented and unrecognized. No matter how impactful they are to the sport, women rarely receive the same recognition as their male counterparts.

Icons like Caitlin Clark, A'ja Wilson, Simone Biles and Alysa Liu are a few examples of those receiving well-deserved recognition.

While these athletes are undeniably deserving of praise, many female professional and collegiate athletes leave profound legacies without receiving the same level of praise, especially not to the same level as their male counterparts.

However, if someone is involved in sports, that doesn't necessarily mean that they are an athlete. For non-athletes, some may be interested in a career in sports, but don't know where to start.

Since sports are a male-dominated field from a fan, player and employee standpoint, young women are often a minority in sports-related spaces.

Two best friends pursuing careers in sports at Charlotte recognized that issue and wanted to create a student organization dedicated to demonstrating to women that they belong in sports. That organization is known as the Women in Sports Society (WISS).

What is WISS?

WISS co-presidents and founders Kelli Blackburn and Chelsea Mathelier had ideas to create a women-oriented sports club during their first year at UNC Charlotte. In 2025, they brought their idea to life and founded WISS to create a safe space for young women to connect through women's sports, regardless of their level of engagement in sports.

WISS gives young women the opportunity to learn more about the sports entertainment industry and sports careers, or simply to talk sports with other women.

Blackburn and Mathelier launched WISS meetings and events on UNC Charlotte's campus at the beginning of the spring 2026 semester.

During their biweekly meetings, they often discuss networking and career advice, or fun sports conversations and activities.

WISS also invites guest speakers currently working in sports to career and networking-focused meetings to share career advice with members. Lauren Stamas, who works in community relations for the Carolina Panthers, was the organization's first guest speaker of the semester.

WISS co-President Mathelier spoke of the significance of Stamas's time speaking with her and other club members. Stamas spoke to the club via Zoom, giving members career advice.

"She let us know that every part of your success isn't just necessarily on paper," Mathelier said. "It's also about personal success and making yourself proud of what you're doing."

For social engagement, the student organization hosts game nights and converses about current sports events. A sports knowledge trivia night was the theme of the first social of the semester.

To celebrate the NCAA Men's Basketball tournament, WISS held a March Madness Night meeting on March 4, encouraging members to bring tournament predictions and wear their favorite team's gear.

The club currently lists 40 members on the roster, with about 20 members returning for bi-weekly meetings, according to Mathelier, marking significant involvement for a recently founded organization.

WHM celebration

To celebrate International Women's Day on March 8, the student organization posted on Instagram to celebrate the most impactful female athletes, past and present.

Women's tennis legends such as Billie Jean King and Serena Williams were recognized as champions and women's sports advocates who reshaped the public image of female athletes. King is a strong advocate for equal pay and Title IX, while Williams advocates against racism and gender bias in athletics.



In the post, WISS also noted that Williams spoke out about maternal health and life-threatening childbirth complications, honoring her as a pioneer in redefining beauty, strength and power standards for women in sports.

Women's History Month not only celebrates women's success across all fields but also highlights women's success in male-dominated fields.

WISS recognized Danica Patrick and Ronda Rousey as outstanding female athletes competing in male-dominated sports.

"The biggest thing that I want the girls to take away from Women's History Month is how important and impactful you are," Mathelier stated. "Every single sport wouldn't be the same without a woman."

Mathelier explained that WISS wants members to know that they are impactful beyond sports. She emphasized the importance of women feeling comfortable in all fields, including those that are male-dominated.

"You are just as important as anyone else in the sports field," Mathelier explained. "Whether you're a man or a woman, you're just as important and impactful. Whether it's inside or outside the sports world, you are just as important as anyone you compete with."

The rapid growth of women's college basketball makes up a large part of WISS's celebration of Women's History Month. Mathelier explained that upcoming meetings would be March Madness themed, celebrating the historic growth of women's basketball.

Women's basketball has helped improve the public's view of women's sports. The 2025 women's NCAA championship game drew more viewers than ever before, even surpassing the men's NCAA championship game.

A sense of community

Members of a new organization would usually still be warming up to each other after only meeting a few times, but according to Mathelier, it's quite the opposite.

"We have a lot of fun, and there are never really awkward moments," Mathelier said. "Everyone kind of feels confident to say what they want to say."

As new members keep joining and returning members continue attending club meetings, Blackburn and Mathelier are showing more young women that they belong in sports with every meeting.

Column: A view from the South Village parking deck

Crawford Anderson | Staff Writer

Going into the week of spring break, I was exhausted, burnt out and ready to throw in the towel.

After taking an evening to rest, I found myself on the sixth floor of the South Village parking deck, enjoying the crisp 77-degree temperature and a light wind that gently massaged the knot in my neck from hunching over my computer for the past week. I was inspired by the view of the city and campus around me. As I strolled around the top level of the deck, each direction across the horizon stirred a different set of contemplations.

North East: Reflection and nostalgia

On the day I wrote this piece, it was the first Admitted Students Day for the upcoming fall 2026 semester, and I had the opportunity to display my room to dozens of incoming first years. It reminded me of my first weeks on campus, which now feel like years ago, not just months.

How can it be that we are approaching the end of the year, and yet it feels like I have lived five years here?

I have come to know a great many people. Now, friends, deep relationships and guys I would call my brothers. How can a few months feel like a few years? How can I feel like a lifelong friend with someone I have known for less than 52 weeks?

And what will happen next?

I am reminded of my first night at Charlotte, hearing the sounds of excited first years out on the South Village lawn, playing volleyball and getting to know each other, while I sat shyly in my room, scared of the future and what it could bring.

Just two days later, I broke out of my timidness and became one of those excited volleyball players. Despite my having the agility of a sea otter on land, my team of first years, who had never met before that evening, won six straight match-ups — no thanks to me, of course — and ended up hopping in the back of someone's pickup truck and going to Cook Out.

I do not even remember their names now, though I occasionally see them in the dining hall.

It is a powerful reminder not to take any moment for granted. At the time, I did not even think it was possible to make it through the first year. It all felt so daunting. So many people to meet. So many things to do. So many Canvas assignments to turn in.

And yet here we are.

South East: Bad memories and hope for a better tomorrow

Over here on the backside, where the heavy machinery sits and what must be a mammoth AC unit twirls away, it is not exactly a place to linger; it is mechanical and uninviting.

Here sit the repressed memories. Things I have not shared. Things I am scared to share, parts of me I would not necessarily want published on the front page.

The nearby retention pond, full of weeds and completely neglected by most students, is surprisingly peaceful and tranquil, especially with the lit Greenway trail running by it.

Perhaps this represents the support of friends if I truly opened up. The likelihood that they would respect and care for me, not neglect or shame me.

South West: A future full of opportunity

From this corner, the upper floors of the tallest Uptown buildings poke above the tree line. The forest around this part of campus almost makes it feel like we are not in a major city.

Looking at those massive skyscrapers, I think of the bright future ahead: opportunity, growth and new experiences.

The occasional misfire from a yellow Mustang snapped me out of too much reflection, reminding me of the chaos and challenges ahead.

But nonetheless, the future looks bright. No pun intended, as I was actively staring at the glowing Charlotte skyline.

Surrounded by good friends, a promising career and a deep sense of contentment, I could not be more excited about what lies ahead.

North West: The fear of falling short

In this corner, where Atrium Health hospital stands out on the dark horizon, and the edge of Hunt Hall is just visible in the periphery, I am reminded of the potential for failure.

Although the future seems bright and although I have been given incredible opportunities to lead my peers, write a growing newsletter and build a small business doing what I love, I cannot help but think about the possibility of falling short.

What if I take the gifts given to me and waste them?

I have goals and dreams. I even have a plan to get there. But the daily execution of the small things that build toward those dreams, and the possibility of failing to do them, is terrifying.

It is one thing not to know where you are going and to stumble along the way.

It is another thing entirely to stumble when you knew the right choice all along.

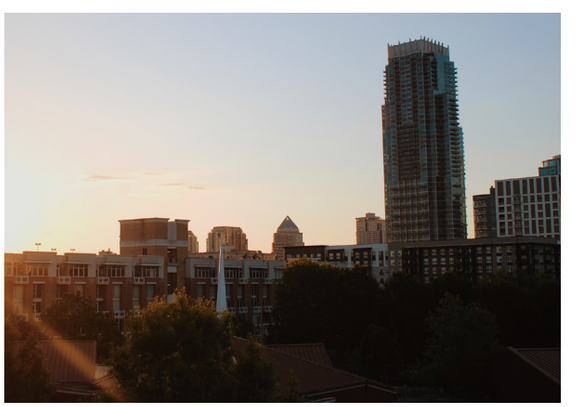
All I can do is pray and hope that I keep making the right choice. Taking life one day at a time and not rushing the future or dwelling on the past too much.

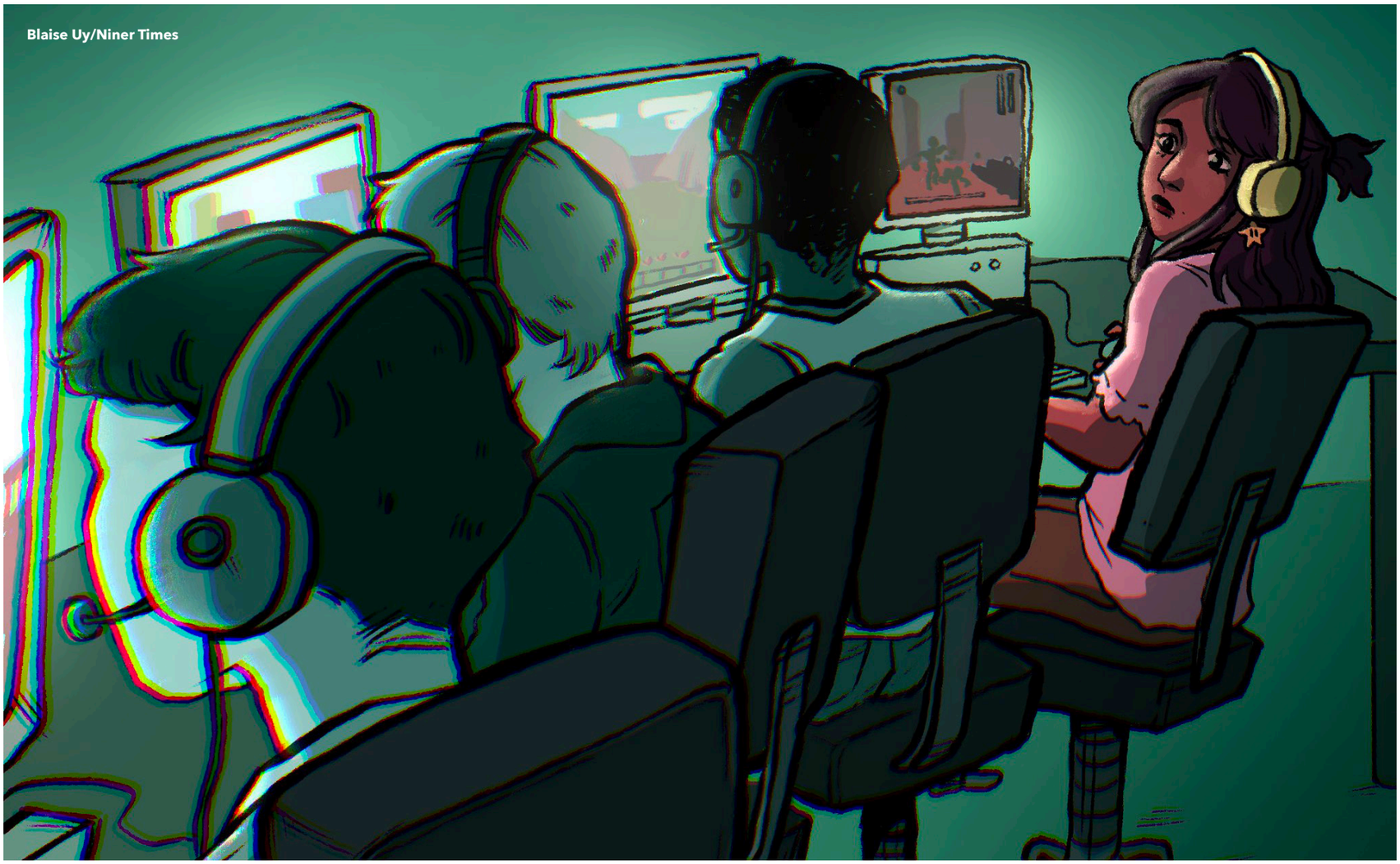
Simply enjoying the moment, making good decisions and learning to be content with the life God has given me today.

Looking out across the four directions from the parking deck, I was reminded that while the past and future pull at us constantly, life is only ever lived in the present moment.


Niner Times File







Blaise Uy/Niner Times

Opinion: Ladies, own your spaces, even if it's hard

Mareska Chettiar | Asst. Copy Editor

As students on a college campus, most of us play games in some capacity — whether it's a puzzle game on your phone or a competitive match on your $3,000 PC setup. However, it's no secret that experiences in gaming communities, especially competitive ones, can be incredibly misogynistic.

Women are often harassed in voice chat, singled out or ignored simply for speaking up. It's no surprise that whenever these communities hold in-person events, women are in the minority, often by a large margin — even though they might be a significant part of the playerbase online.

According to the Entertainment Software Association's 2025 report, women make up 48% of all gamers. However, representation in professional competitive esports is close to none, with some exceptions, such as VALORANT's Game Changers League or Counter-Strike 2's ESL Impact League. Mixed-gender teams are even rarer, with many being disbanded or transitioned into female-only teams.

But being caught up in the depressing scene of competitive gaming can lead many to forget the vibrant, thriving communities that exist on the non-competitive side.

Genres like puzzle, role-playing games, family or farming simulators have a large female playerbase. These genres are underrepresented both in media and in online spaces, and many of the people who play these types of games are called "casual" gamers — further perpetuating the stereotype that you need a thousand-dollar PC or $500 PS5 to be considered a gamer, which isn't true.

The beauty of video games is their ability to bring people together, regardless of their physical abilities. Though non-competitive gaming communities don't often hold events in person, they're a great example of how people can gather, play their games and have fun without stereotypes creating arbitrary divides. The competitive gaming community has a lot to learn from other genres in the industry.

While opportunities for women in professional gaming spaces are still rising, and the representation we need is far from present, it's up to us to take the first difficult step into spaces where we're historically underrepresented. And what better place to start than right here, on UNC Charlotte's campus?

Don't let the fear of sexism stop you from being fully immersed in your passions. Ladies, own your space, no matter which male-dominated field it may be: you belong. Whether it's the gym or video games, or professional spaces like medicine, law or philosophy — you belong.

Men, make sure you're actively advocating for women. It's always been a choice to either remain complicit in a system that oppresses half the population or respect and elevate your fellow human beings.

If women feel welcomed in the competitive gaming space, then maybe one day, we can all sit together and have fun in the Popp-Martin Student Union esports arena with only good company and making memories at the forefront of our minds.

That's the essence of gaming, after all.



Opinion: Conspiracy theories shouldn't be easier to believe than women

Noah Hughey | Staff Writer

Skyler Nyutu/Niner Times

For years, women have been publicly telling their stories of being trafficked and abused by convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein and those around him. To the police, to the media, online and in public speaking events, they have continuously, without avail, appealed to the public to investigate and prosecute their legitimate claims of sexual abuse and human trafficking.

But now, with the release of the "Epstein files," online conspiracy theorists have instead platformed unfounded accusations while casting doubt on these women's stories, showing just how far our society goes to ignore women who have experienced sexual abuse while aggrandizing the rich and powerful only if they personally inconvenience themselves.

The release of the Epstein files was marketed by some as a push toward justice. That they would condemn the wicked and vindicate the innocent, bringing down those implicated in the worst crimes and providing the public clarity on the role Epstein had in American government, politics and culture. Instead, however, the truth became harder to find, as disillusioned online activists and armchair experts platformed either unsubstantiated or definitively false stories contained in the files as proof of whatever evil cabal they were interested in blaming for their personal misfortunes.

Among the overwhelming stream of files released by the Department of Justice (DOJ) earlier this year from the Epstein files came salacious stories that garnered the attention of millions of online users. "Epstein and the people around him weren't involved only in sexual exploitation," Facebook user JAN Writer wrote, a damning screenshot included of a redacted file. "The allegations point to something far more disturbing, extending to extreme acts like cannibalism and ritualized violence."

This particular story was the perfect storm of intrigue, body horror and political implication. Allegedly, a redacted individual interviewed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 2019 said he was sexually abused by then-convicted sex offender Epstein and then-President Bill Clinton at a yacht party in 2000 attended by Donald Trump and his partner, Melania.

Online, conspiracy theorists and half-wit influencers spread the claim, which the official file written by an agent explicitly notes that the individual "offered NO supporting or corroborating evidence or witnesses that could be contacted," and "appeared to me emotionally unbalanced and not intoxicated." But this seemed to have come second to the internet sleuths, who supplemented the individual's utter disregard for evidence with an unrelated and out-of-context, decades-old video of Mexican model Gabriela Rico Jiménez having a nervous breakdown in a Monterrey hotel.

"'They ate humans!'!!!! 2009: 21yo model Gabriela Rico Jiménez screams about elites eating people, rituals, & sacrifices at an elite party," one user wrote on X, with the post reaching over a million views. "She vanishes after police take her. 2026 Epstein files drop extreme ritual/cannibalism allegations from victims… Coincidence? And she was telling the truth?"

Rather than admit that the story held no credence, conspiracy theorists filled the gap in information with an unrelated internet urban legend over 20 years old. Somehow, this video was supposed to account for the fact that the FBI report being used as proof of the cannibal conspiracy itself rejected the individual's story.

But if that was not enough evidence of the internet sleuth's irresponsibility, then let's not forget one essential fact also contained in the file. "[The redacted individual] states the also current president TRUMP along with his wife MELANIA were present during the said yacht trip in 2000," the file states. "(TRUMP not married to his current spouse, MELANIA until 05)."

If this is how the internet reacted to verifiably false stories, then where was the outcry for the women who filed various reports over the years alleging credible abuse, many of whom were vindicated by the files' release? One Reddit user on r/changemyview wrote, "Many say that they're afraid of assassination. If they are, they have a strange way of showing it - they have made public speeches showing their names and faces, and some of them actually [recently] appeared in a superbowl ad showing their faces to 120 million+ people."

For the years that women have been telling their stories about being abused and ignored by the authorities, the general public only became active when there was a chance to prove an evil cabal was interfering with their own personal lives. When it seemed that Epstein influenced the creation of /pol/ on the chat site 4Chan, the sleuths jumped into action to expose the ring that is manipulating them, the innocent web surfers. But the women who have been calling out provable crimes committed against them are greeted with silence, if not objection.

This does not have to be a competition between two horrible stories. But the fact is, the public, especially online, has chosen only to believe one story because it implicates them in some way. Their selfishness goes further than just ignorance of the crimes committed against the women who have been brave enough to step out and call for justice; it is blatant enabling of those crimes while they focus on unfounded nonsense.

Now, we all know that the Epstein files do not definitively prove the cannibal cabal was real. And yet, no apologies have been made, no focus re-shifted onto the women still advocating for justice as the DOJ fumbles its release of the files. Perhaps it is best to start there. It is because someone chose to believe a woman who told her story of abuse that Epstein ultimately died in a prison cell rather than a penthouse. If anyone who claims to care about justice wants to be led to the truth, perhaps it is best to start by believing the women who have been telling it.



Blaise Uy/Niner Times

Opinion: The 'unelectable woman' is a self-fulfilling prophecy

Hobart Jones & Emsley Jackson | Staff Writer & Opinion Editor

Throughout our 250 years as a nation, and 237 since the first presidential inauguration, a woman has surprisingly never held our highest office. It's strange when you consider every other part of our government has featured numerous women, from the Supreme Court to governorships and Congress. It's also strange considering that of the 193 United Nations member countries around the globe, 63 have ever had a woman leader.

Women have been, are and can be leaders, so what's America's issue?

What is one to make of this? For some, it is enough that it has been simply impossible for a woman to be elected president. For some on the political right, it's proof they simply don't have what it takes. For others on the left, it's proof that America is too sexist of a country to allow such a thing to happen.

No matter what one's reasoning is, they arrive at the same conclusion. Women candidates need not run; only men are up to the task. Such conclusions have no basis in reality and only serve to make it harder for women to try.

A key question one should ask, if one ever thought anything above was true, is "Why?" Why do you believe a woman can not win? Many well-meaning people spout such statements without ever investigating their validity or understanding their weight. Is it an inherent flaw in the candidate, or an inherent flaw in our collective mindsets?

For many, recent history serves as the basis for their arguments. Hillary Clinton's loss in 2016, Kamala Harris in 2024. Both candidates lost to Donald Trump, their male opponent. Drawing on these elections, they say a female win is never possible. What actually happened in both elections is more complex.

2016 serves as one of the most consequential elections in our country's recent history. The result fundamentally changed how politics in our country operate to this day, if not completely rewiring them. Because of this, many ideas of political folklore have been created by the nation writ large.

Right after the election, there was a pretty easy explanation the public could use to explain the loss. In the final days of the race, FBI Director James Comey reopened an investigation into Clinton's email usage. He sent a letter to Congress explaining as much.

Nate Silver, founder of the election analysis site 538, suggested that the scandal likely cost Clinton around 3-4 percentage points. In such a close election, in which she lost by a combined 1.72 percentage points in Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania, the timing of this investigation was detrimental.

In the years that followed, popular conceptions of the race changed. In 2019, an Ipsos poll found 76% of Democratic respondents believed gender played a role in Clinton's defeat. In the same poll, 39% of respondents believed a woman would have a harder time defeating Trump.

The 2016 defeat began to be used as evidence that male candidates are the more 'electable' option. This revisionist take ignores the fact that Clinton won the popular vote by three million votes. There was a growing dissonance between what actually happened and what people thought had happened.

The 2020 Democratic primary saw the most women candidates in the history of presidential elections. Six different women put themselves in the running, all eventually withdrawing, but Harris went on to be Joe Biden's pick for vice president. Democratic primary voters were zeroed in on "electability." Democratic voters wanted someone they thought would beat Trump.

That someone, in the minds of these voters, apparently had to be a man. In a 2020 Los Angeles Times poll, seven out of 10 respondents stated that a man would be the party's best bet. Bowling Green State University political science professor Melissa Miller explained to NBC News the cycle as follows: "Folks are convinced that a woman can't win, so they don't vote for a woman, thus ensuring that a woman doesn't win, and the cycle continues."

Biden would, of course, go on to be the party's nominee and beat Trump. He would win the popular vote by four points, two points higher than Clinton's margin in 2016. Lower than Silver's estimated total with no Comey letter.

However, it does not stop there; Donald Trump in 2016 was still at least unknown. There was still uncertainty about what a Trump presidency would look like in practice. Biden ran against an unpopular Trump presidency, with Trump eight points underwater by the time of the election.

Biden's victory confirmed for many what they had already thought. A man won, and a woman lost, not in reality but in theory. The 2024 election would once again be plagued by this dynamic. Biden was not up to the task of running and dropped out, prompting his vice president, Kamala Harris, to run in his stead.

Her replacement of Biden would be followed by a surge in favorable polling. When Trump was on track, according to Biden's own internal polling, he was expected to win 400 electoral college votes. After the swap, the race became neck and neck.

Harris would, as we know, ultimately lose the election. The margin, when all was said and done, was 1.5%, which is roughly two million votes. Post-election, the apparent reason voters did not back Harris was that she was part of an unpopular administration. Harris didn't lose because she was a woman, but because she happened to be the incumbent vice president in a 'change' election.

As in 2016, the loss would soon be transformed into proof that a woman can never win.

The Democratic National Convention's report on the election suggests that it was policy dissatisfaction, especially the Biden administration's stance on Gaza and the economy, in fact, not Harris' womanhood, that caused her to lose support. Clinton and Harris both lost their elections for candidate-specific reasons. Not gender-specific.

There is no tried-and-true evidence to suggest that a woman is incapable of winning in the future, including in 2028. Women have proven to be successful leaders in so many capacities and across so many countries, so why not here? We need to ditch the narrative that it isn't possible, because it has been the driving force behind why it hasn't been.