

NINERTIMES

Student-driven news since 1947

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THE

SEARCH



FOR

SESTERHOOD



AT UNC CHARLOTTE'S

BID NIGHT

MORE ON PAGE 8

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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.

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Events to watch for on and off campus

Self Care and Social Connections

Sept. 11, 2-4 P.M.
Star Quad

Hech. Lake Day
Sept. 11, 2-6 P.M.
Hechenbleikner Lake

Women's soccer vs UNCG

Sept. 11, 7 P.M.
Charlotte Soccer Field

Family Weekend Legacy Lunch
Sept. 12, 11:30-1:30 P.M.
Harris Alumni Center

Light Rail Scavenger Hunt

Sept. 12, 3-6 P.M.
Campus Main LYNX Station

Men's soccer vs Tulsa
Sept. 12, 7 P.M.
Charlotte Soccer Field

From the Charlotte police logs (Aug. 31 - Sept. 5)

Montserrat Marcelo-Morales | Staff Writer

The following are some incidents in the UNC Charlotte campus police logs from Aug. 31 to Sept. 5, 2025.

Aug. 31 Investigate

An officer responded to Colvard after parents reported concerns about their daughter, no longer enrolled, possessing their vehicle. The student complied, returning the keys, and the car was released without incident.

Sept. 3 Fraud/forgery

Dispatch received a report of possible fraud involving a student. A man said a woman posed as a professor and defrauded him. The incident occurred off campus, and CMPD was notified.

Sept. 4 Assist other agency

CMPD alerted dispatch to a suspicious person near Lot Six. Officers searched multiple areas, including Greek Village and John Kirk Drive, but found no one matching the description.

NOTES FROM THE NEWSROOM:

Scenes from the bus stop

Emsley Jackson | Opinion Editor

The other day, I ran into an old friend at a bus stop. We shot the breeze for a few minutes, small talk broken up by glances down Craver to see if our routes were coming. I texted my friend about the encounter. She responded, "If there was a show about your life here, it would be called 'The Bus Stop.'"

Fade in: freshman year, Student Union East stop—daytime. I first took the bus as a shortcut to avoid the stairs between my classes and my dorm. I fell in love with the bus after realizing it was anything but a shortcut. It turned out to be the most scenic route in navigating college, with all the

sights and sounds that make the journey worth it.

Because of a meaningless conversation at a bus stop two years ago, I made a meaningful connection with a now-close friend. We cooked dinner together last week. Countless hours of music, both new discoveries and old favorites, have filled bus rides while I stared out the window. A sticky note reading, "Go for it. Missed opportunities hurt much more than rejections," gave me the courage to apply for a scholarship I later received. Guess where I saw it posted.

I have ridden the bus in the freezing cold, sweltering heat, pouring rain, earliest mornings

and latest nights. I saw my first snowfall in years while sitting at a campus bus stop. How lucky I was to catch that beautiful moment sheltered under an awning of glass.

In that same text conversation with my friend, she said, "You make me want to ride the bus." This romanticization of a mundane aspect of campus life may seem silly to some. People get on, people get off, the world keeps spinning. But each and every time I find myself at a bus stop, I am grateful for the opportunity to pause and watch the world instead of letting it pass me by.

‘The Nail Girl’: How one Charlotte student found her spark

Madeline Andrews | Staff Writer

Tents started to fill the CHHS/COED plaza on Thursday, Sept 4. Packed set-ups full of clothing racks, table displays and even a pile of clothes to be bought in bulk were in the heart of campus. Norm’s Vintage Market is a recurring event designed to bring local businesses to campus. The vast majority of the vendors sell vintage and secondhand clothes, but one seller stood out.

In the center of the plaza, a small folding table was covered with colorful sets of press-on nails, painted by hand, organized by size and designed for at-home application.

“Nail salons were getting insanely expensive. I would load up mine with charms and gems, and they would cost like \$130,” Sophia Park said, the creator of SPRK Nails and owner of the standout vendor.

SPRK stands for Park’s initials and the word spark, the slogan being “my name, my spark.”

Park is a fourth-year student who founded SPRK nails to provide an option to college students who want an affordable way to get intricate nails. SPRK offers press-on nails sold at vendor events similar to Norms Vintage Market, as well as in-home Gel-X nails done by Park herself.

At Norm’s Vintage Market, Park’s booth offered a variety of colorful press-on sets, some with beachy designs, others with grungy and metallic finishes, all ranging from \$30 to \$60, based on length and intricacy. All were laid out neatly, with colored stickers on the back corresponding to the price and size.

“Each design takes me anywhere from 30 minutes to four hours to complete,” Park stated.

Park was a second-year at UNC Charlotte when she began teaching herself

how to make Gel-X nail extensions, a popular medium of faux nails. Starting with YouTube tutorials and starter supplies from Amazon, she fell in love with the art form, practicing for five hours a day, experimenting on friends and posting her progress on social media.

Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram are all platforms that have helped promote SPRK Nails. Park would post her work and availability on the class of 2026 Snapchat story multiple times per week, and clients started to flood her messages. She has since served over 100 different clients, and currently has 30 recurring clients whom she visits every three weeks with her mobile services. Park went viral on Instagram Reels in April, with the video of her doing another student’s nails on the second floor of Atkins Library reaching nearly 600,000 views.

“We’re all college stu-

dents, not everyone has a car or their own apartment,” Park said. She loves being welcomed into her clients’ homes, who often give her food while she works.

“I have only dealt with a couple of confused moms wondering what I was doing at their house,” Park added.

She aims to make her products as accessible to students as possible, even if that

means getting the occasional weird look from parents and library staff.

An average day for Park includes classes in the morning, mobile nail-tech appointments until 8 p.m., followed by hand-crafting press-on designs until 2 a.m.. “I hibernate on Sundays,” Park joked.

Success does not come without support

and encouragement, and Park claims that it is friendship that has gotten her to this level. Her two best friends, fourth-year students Noa Tazza and Jessica Mao, were running the nail stand alongside Park.

“It started as a fun way to hang out with each other,” Mao explained. They had stayed up the night before the market, making over 100 sets to sell, organizing prep-kits and stuffing goodie bags. During the market, they helped customers with correct sizing and prices. “I have so much appreciation for the work required to run this business,” Mao said.

SPRK Nails’ popularity only increased from Norms Niner Market, with students buying over 60 sets and scheduling appointments for mobile service. Even with the swarms of people, Park seemed to be in her element.

“This doesn’t feel like work at all. I am just talking to people my age and making friends,” Park claimed. She had a casual rapport with most of the students who approached her, one stopping by the booth to say that her nails were still intact after four weeks.

“Being an entrepreneur isn’t just about selling a product; it’s about building an identity and community around what you love,” Park said.



Courtesy of Sophia Park

The artistic passion: Ben Still and Claudio Olivera at the Faculty & Friends concert

Audrey Leigh | Staff Writer

Mei Podvojsky/Niner Times

Artistic passion ignited the stage during Ben Still and Claudio Olivera's performance at the Faculty & Friends concert on Aug. 26. Hosted by the UNC Charlotte Department of Music, this first concert of the semester overflowed with emotion and artistry.

The love Still and Olivera have for their music was apparent. Still playing the soprano, alto and tenor saxophone and Olivera on the piano, the music flowed well, sounding like they had been practicing for years.

A saxophone is a relatively new instrument compared to typical classical instruments like the piano, meaning the repertoire to choose from is comparatively limited. Even so, the movement of the pieces Still chose created an intoxicating atmosphere. Their combined passionate performance resonated through each piece played, including John Fitz Rogers' "Breaking," Edison Denisov's "Sonata" and Andy Scott's "And Everything Is Still..."

Olivera said he suggested the first two songs played, while Still completed the program by choosing pieces that balanced Olivera's choices, creating a cohesive performance. Of the works Still performed, he said his favorites were "Breaking" by Fitz Rogers and "Sonata" by Denisov.

While playing the saxophone with a piano accompaniment is a common practice, combining the two in performance presents a unique set of challenges.

"Maybe it's an entrance or an exit, a release, some kind of really difficult passage where it's like, 'All right, take it to the end of this. I need to make sure I give a big, strong downbeat here by lifting my saxophone,' or Claudio Olivera, he'll lift his head and give a nod, like, 'here's where we're at.' I really enjoy that process of collaborating," Still remarked.

True to any performer, both artists have spent hours rehearsing for their Charlotte

performance. However, there is always room for improvement, which is why Still and Olivera have decided to record the performance later to preserve it.

To students, Still and Olivera both agree that practice is key to pursuing music. Still recommends blocking a short amount of time in your schedule to practice consistently every day. He noted that short periods every day, compared to long periods every other day, are more effective in avoiding burnout.

Ben Still

Still is a professor at UNC Charlotte, teaching applied saxophone and chamber music in the Department of Music. He joined the faculty at Charlotte in 2017, having previously taught at Lenoir-Rhyne University, Catawba Valley Community College, the UNC School of the Arts and Texas Tech University.

However, he attended UNC Charlotte for his undergraduate studies in music performance from 2009 to 2013. Then, he pursued his master's and doctoral degrees in performance at Texas Tech University.

Yet it wasn't just his campus ties that made the Aug. 26 performance special for Still.

"My wife was there, which is always fun, and she comes to hear me play in a lot of different things, so she hears me practicing a lot. And I actually told her after the concert, 'You got to hear all that stuff, but in its full form, because it was with piano.' And she actually told me, 'I normally tune you out when you're practicing,'" laughed Still.

Still began reading music from a young age, starting with the piano. He branched out from piano in the fifth grade when he took up the clarinet, and in the sixth grade, discovered his love for the saxophone.

"My mom really liked the saxophone. And my brother's a trumpet player; he's older than me. So I was like, 'I can't do a brass instrument.' So it had to be a woodwind, and the coolest woodwind is the saxophone," Still explained.

Throughout his extensive career, Still has performed in numerous events, including the North American Saxophone Alliance conferences, the Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic, the International Saxophone Symposium and the Texas Music Educators Association Conference. Still has

performed with professional organizations such as the Western Piedmont Symphony, Piedmont Wind Symphony, Lubbock Symphony Orchestra and the Midland-Odessa Symphony Orchestra. Also performing in ensembles featuring artists such as Rodney Booth, Steve Lippia, John Riley and Bill Watrous.

Still is also a founding member of the Mirasol Quartet, which has won numerous national chamber music competitions, such as first place in the American Prize Chamber Music Competition and Grand Prize in the ENKOR Chamber Music Competition.

"Proudest moment... probably winning the gold medal at the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition," Still reminisced.

Claudio Olivera

Olivera obtained his undergraduate degree in Production Engineering at the Universidad Simón Bolívar in Venezuela. Olivera also holds a Pianist Certificate from the Juan José Landaeta Conservatory and a master's in Piano and Pedagogy from Germany's Martin Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg. Olivera later earned a Doctor of Musical Arts in Piano Performance from the University of South Carolina.

Like Still, Olivera has been involved in the music industry for most of his life. Olivera discovered his love of music in Venezuela at the age of eight, when he began his musical studies. At the age of 12, he made his debut as a soloist with an orchestra.

Olivera has many achievements, including performing with nearly every major Venezuelan orchestra and internationally in Germany, Italy, Chile, Spain, France and the U.S. In addition, Olivera has served as adjunct piano faculty and staff accompanist at the University of South Carolina, received the Yamaha In-Residency Fellowship for innovative community engagement, and was a three-time recipient of the Steinway & Sons Top Teacher Award (2018, 2019, 2021).

When asked about his greatest accomplishment, family came first.

"You know, getting married or getting my first child when he was born. That's, of course, amazing," Olivera beamed.





Student-created “Legendary Dating Show” packs Cone and draws drama

Madeline Andrews | Staff Writer

On the night of Thursday, Sept. 4, Cone After Hours was completely dark. Cameras were all around the room, constantly rolling. A harsh spotlight flooded a previously dark stage. In the wings, two rows of students waited to face each other. The “Legendary Dating Show” was about to begin.

“It all started as a joke,” Dale Cover said, a second-year student who orchestrated the event. He wore a fitted blue suit and clean white sneakers, resembling a game show host from a different time. Cover’s three cameramen circled the room, getting shots of all angles of the affair.

“Everyone thought it was a crazy idea until it actually happened,” Cover said.

Dating apps are a reality for many young adults; Pew Research Center reports that 79% of adults under 30 have used a dating app before. Twenty percent of young adults claim to have met their current partner on an app.

Tinder, the most downloaded dating app, popularized the swiping feature, where you swipe right on a profile to indicate interest, and if two users swipe right on each other, they match, allowing them to message each other in the app. The swipe feature took off, and now most dating platforms function with a similar mechanism, sending swiping into popular culture.

Jubilee, a YouTube channel, created a video titled “Dating App in Real Life,” in which 30 female contestants face one man. The video received nearly 30 million views, and the genre remains popular on the site.

Cover made a similar video last spring titled “We Did a College Dating Show,” filmed on campus with all student participants. The video received over 41,000 views and made a few of the contestants well-known on campus. Cover currently has over 2,000 subscribers on YouTube.

“Everyone got started with YouTube, whether

it was a gaming channel or some hobby they did back when they were a kid,” Cover explained. “I feel like as we grow older, we have these dreams and aspirations, but we let them go because they’re not realistic anymore.”

However, his dream was made a reality with the virality of the first Legendary Dating Show video.

The second video saw nearly 100 people fill Cone on Thursday night, as students gathered to participate or watch.

The show was structured into two parts. In the first half, male contestants lined up on the left side of the stage, and females on the right. Pairs would meet in the center of the stage, and on the count of three, they would swipe right or left on the person they were facing. If both people ‘swiped,’ or gestured left on each other, they would be sent to the back of their lines. If they answered differently, the person who swiped left would stay on the stage and face the next person in the opposing line, sending the contestant who swiped right to the back of the group. If both swiped right on each other, they would be sent to a row of chairs at the back of the stage and would now be considered a couple.

It took nearly 20 minutes before any couples were made. One contestant pretended to propose to his partner with his hat, and another dramatically swiped left on the woman in front of him. As a result, she flipped him off and walked to the back of the line, laughing.

“I participated last year, and let’s just say, things didn’t go the way I expected,” said a third-year student who chose to stay anonymous.

The participant had been featured in the first Legendary Dating Show and was left without a date after some interference from other participants.

“I’m back for redemption, and even if things don’t go well dating-wise, hopefully I can at least meet a new friend,” the contestant said.

Other participants were encouraged by the limelight.

“I want to be the most insane person on the camera,” Claire said, a second-year student and a second-time contestant.

Throughout the show, Claire and other participants performed stunts and made outlandish comments to maximize their on-screen time. At least two contestants were self-identified lesbians, but wanted to participate for the camera.

After the matches had been made, the players entered a speed dating round, which acted as the second half of the show. A table and two chairs were placed in the center of the stage, where each couple was given five minutes to talk and get to know each other in front of an audience. Two red placards, one reading “steal” and the other, “swap,” were on the table. After the first 30 seconds of the round, either contestant could swap their current partner with any other player out in the audience, handing their desired match the swap card from the table.

Additionally, a contestant from the audience could approach the table and grab the steal card, allowing them to steal the spot of one of the participants and continue the date.

The speed-dating round was hectic: one contestant quick-changed into a gorilla costume, another spoke in an accent for the entire hour, utilizing the steal card to get on stage as often as possible. Throughout, the audience groaned, yelled demands and shouted words of encouragement.

Regardless of the intention being love or celebrity, nearly everyone in the audience attributed their attendance to some connection to Cover.

Cover recalls the beginning of college being stressful for him; he was shy as a freshman, overwhelmed by the new people and possibilities.

“I remember looking around the dining hall on the first day, wondering who I could sit with, and I ended up sitting alone,” Cover shared. “Over time, I pushed myself to meet new people and do my thing, and now wherever I go, there is someone that I know. I was able to turn this place that initially felt scary with strangers everywhere into a place that feels like home.”

“I love that college allows people to connect in this way; everyone gets a chance to be legendary.”

Late to class before the bell: Charlotte students struggling to find parking on campus

Kyle Boucher | Staff Writer

After snoozing alarms, skipping breakfast and rushing through your morning routine, a parking spot represents respite, the final destination at the end of a stressful morning. Unfortunately for UNC Charlotte students, this rewarding comfort has been hard to come by as of late.

Mornings this fall 2025 semester often start with students circling parking lots, hoping to find an empty spot. While parking struggles are nothing new, many say that the parking situation on campus has deteriorated over the years.

With a record enrollment of over 32,000 students this year, many have expressed concerns about how, while the University may continue to grow, so do the parking problems.

Eric Grunwald, a fourth-year student, explained that he has been commuting to school for the last three years. During his first two years parking on campus, he did not find as much difficulty as he does now.

“There was never a time I couldn’t find a parking spot [in 2023],” Grunwald said.

Aaron Moore, a third-year student, shared that on some days, by 10 a.m., there is hardly any parking, and the situation worsens as the day progresses.

It is from these many daily problems that students have begun to ask themselves how they are meant to get to class without parking.

In response, University administration says plans are underway to alleviate the current parking crisis.

A ‘master’ plan

According to Nancy Smith, director of Parking and Transportation at Charlotte, the Department of Parking and Transportation on campus has recently contracted with a private master planning company, Walter P. Moore and Associates, to revise the master plan with a focus on improving parking and transportation.

Charlotte’s master plan is an in-depth layout for the infrastructure of a location, specifically the campus.

For the next six months, the University will collaborate with Walter P. Moore and Associates to develop an enhanced layout of sidewalks, streets, parking areas and on-campus transportation, including buses.

This master plan will be designed to support the campus master plan created last year. The purpose of this master plan is to provide the University with a new direction for the next decade, outlining how to remodel its parking and transportation infrastructure and possibly reconstruct or build new parking lots and roads.

The University will conduct an in-depth review of the current parking situation and work to find solutions to improve it. Through the master plan, the University aims to reduce traffic congestion on campus during peak hours and facilitate easier parking for students.

Although it will take some time, this is a first step in finding a longer-lasting solution to the current parking fiasco.

Additionally, the University has acquired an

apartment complex, The Edge, located right outside campus, which will enable more students to live within walking distance of the campus.

Words of advice

As it will be some time until these changes begin to benefit students, Smith has offered solutions to students seeking parking.

“I would suggest that people park in the outer areas, such as North Deck, CRI Deck or South Village Deck,” Smith said.

Smith says the CRI Deck is primarily the most available parking deck for any student who needs a spot. The deck often has significantly more availability than the busier parking areas, such as East Deck or Union Deck.

This does mean adding a few more minutes of walking, but in the time it takes to circle a busy lot to find a space, the added commute could be worth it. There are also bus stops located right outside North Deck, CRI Deck and South Village Deck, providing students with easier access to transportation.

Smith said that the fall of 2025 has brought about 700 new commuter students. Given the increasing population of students, the number of commuting students is likely to continue rising in the coming years.

“This is the busiest I’ve seen parking since before COVID-19,” Smith said.

Smith noted that the parking lots are busiest on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

As observed by those struggling to find a spot,

Smith said that parking is traditionally most elusive at the start of the year, especially the first week of class.

Many students go to campus to pick up their textbooks, meet with friends or walk around campus to find their classes. However, as students figure out their schedules, the parking lots that work best for them and the optimal times to arrive on campus, parking often becomes more manageable.

Until then

Finding parking may be difficult right now, but the University claims that it is working on plans for long-term improvement.

In the meantime, students struggling to find parking are encouraged to use alternative parking options, explore different transportation methods to campus or arrive earlier.

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Niner’s Comics: Parking predicament

Caitlin Hanson | Staff Illustrator



Charlotte Hispanic Heritage festival cancellation sparks mixed emotions in Charlotte's Hispanic community

Montserrat Marcelo-Morales | Staff Writer

In a surprise announcement, Charlotte's fifth annual Hispanic Heritage Festival, was cancelled this year due to concerns regarding possible interference from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The Hispanic Heritage Festival was founded by Rick Herrera and Ashley Manzano. Herrera was born in Ecuador and moved to Charlotte at the age of eight.

As questions arose about why the decision was made, Manzano shared his thought process that led to the cancellation.

"It was an easy decision for us. We've been involved in this for a few years now, and the community is very important to us. So, our number one priority is the safety and security of the people who come out and join us," Manzano said in an interview with Charlotte Today. "We look forward to next year and hope that we can be more confident with the security of the community, and we think it will be bigger and better in 2026."

Taking place during Hispanic heritage month, the Hispanic Heritage Festival features tables representing various Hispanic cultures. Tables often hold food that is prepared freshly for attendees to enjoy. There are vendors who sell items such as traditional art pieces and items of clothing that represent their country. Music from various regions is accompanied by vibrant dance performances. The festival is held in Truist Field, located in uptown Charlotte, and has had over 10,000 in attendance each year.

To protect the safety and security of the community, Herrera and Manzano have decided to put the festival on pause, with the intention of hopefully continuing the annual celebration in 2026.

"Do you want to be profitable, or do you really want to face reality? [And] that reality is what's happening in the immigration scenario. The immigration climate is hot," Herrera said.

Throughout 2025, there have been many anti-immigration policies passed that have created fear throughout immigrant communities.

As a result of the increase in anti-immigration policy, immigrants arrests have increased nationwide, including in the Queen City.

According to Aaron Sanchez-Guerra from WUNC North Carolina Public Radio, there has been a 170% increase in arrests in North Carolina since 2024. From this percentage, 38% have been in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg region.

There have been mixed emotions about the cancellation of the event this year, with some sharing disappointment and others thankful that the co-founders care more about the community than about profit.

"I think in time, right now, with the circum-

stances that are happening politically, where we stand with the administration. I think this isn't a surprise. It doesn't come as a shocker to anybody," third-year student Ana Trejo Ramirez said.

Outside of her studies, Ramirez serves as the fundraising chair of Hispanic College Awareness Program.

"In some ways, I'm pretty disappointed that an event used to uplift culture is canceled, but I think I do feel a bit relieved," Ramirez said. "I think there could have been a lot of safety concerns. I obviously don't think backing down is the right way to go, but I think maybe in the aspects of safety, it's not the worst thing that could have happened."

UNC Charlotte International Festival holds steady

Despite the city of Charlotte having to pause its festival, UNC Charlotte's campus still plans to bring its annual International Festival, one of the biggest events of the academic year, to campus.

At the festival, music and dance performances are held both inside and outside the building, creating an exciting atmosphere. The festival features numerous Hispanic tables representing various countries.

Previous attendance at the festival has been estimated to exceed 20,000. While UNC Charlotte International Festival gives the Hispanic community a chance to share their culture, and with the



Campus impact

What does this mean for UNC Charlotte students?

With the cancellation and fear of ICE raids at future Hispanic events, it can remove the sense of connection and belongingness that celebration events bring to them and their loved ones.

There are many Hispanic student organizations on campus that have collaborated with organizations outside of the campus. The LatinX Student Union volunteers with ourBRIDGE for KIDS and have helped newly arrived immigrants, refugees and first-generation students in areas of education and well-being.

Many students within our campus volunteer and care for immigrant communities.

current immigration climate, there are questions and opinions on how Hispanic tables or attendees will be affected.

UNC Charlotte has hosted the International Festival annually since 1975. And with the festival approaching on Sept. 27, opinions are emerging regarding how many Hispanic student attendees will participate and if the festival could act as an indicator for future Hispanic-led events.

"Although the organizations I'm in don't work directly with the festival, I can see it affecting attendance. I think cancelling the festival due to fears of ICE showing up is going to further spread those same fears," third-year Allison Hernandez-Octaviano said, president of Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority Inc., advocacy chair

Megan Khor/ Niner Times & Courtesy of WCNC

of Latines for Action, Change & Empowerment and community liaison for Intersectional Justice Alliance.

Latin/Hispanic organizations on campus

Charlotte's Latin and Hispanic presence is a big part of campus culture. Numerous organizations have experienced significant growth and increased popularity over the past few years. With around 12 student organizations or chapters dedicated to Hispanic students, their presence is strong regardless of festival cancellations.

The following are some of the student groups on campus:

The Latin American Student Organization is the largest Latin organization on campus. They are a culturally diverse organization that helps Latin and Hispanic students enhance different aspects of their academic journey.

The LatinX Student Union was founded to empower the community through leadership roles and address the challenges the Latin community faces. Their mission is to transform the future of Latin communities.

The Latinx Honor Society promotes academic excellence for Latin students. They help members develop professional skills and assist local Latinx communities in the Charlotte area.

The Hispanic College Awareness Program is an organization that advocates for higher education to K-12 Hispanic and other minority students. They support academic achievement and host events on college preparedness and professional development.

Latinos for Action, Change, and Empowerment is a rising organization that advocates for social change and justice on issues affecting the Latin community. They share political rights and tools to help students learn their rights and how they can advocate for change in their community.

Association of Latino Professionals for America is an organization that prepares Latin men and women for career readiness by providing skills and resources for opportunity growth. Networking with different professionals and employers is a huge resource and is open to any major.

The Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers empowers and increases the enrollment of Hispanic engineers in STEM areas. They offer diverse career opportunities and hands-on activities to ensure students' success throughout their academic journey.

The search for sisterhood at UNC Charlotte's Bid Night

Davis Cuffe | Editor-In-Chief

With the sun setting over campus, a restless crowd formed outside Halton Arena, where the future of Charlotte's sorority sister hopefuls hung in sealed white envelopes.

"I'm excited, but I'm literally, like, so nervous. Like I am, like, shaking," first-year student Ayla Slavin said.

Slavin stood among more than 250 athleisure-clad women, all ready to sprint, scream and shout across a Halton Arena floor that was typically reserved for basketball.

Bid Night had arrived at UNC Charlotte, and after days of recruitment, Slavin and those around her couldn't be more nervous.

Chasing connection at UNC Charlotte

Since the dawn of time, humans have sought community, gathering in caves or comment sections to get a little closer to one another.

On American campuses, Greek Life often serves as a shortcut to finding that community. It's why Slavin and the others gathered outside Halton went through rounds of recruitment and will eventually pay to be a part of Greek Life.

"I'm from Colorado, I moved out here, knowing absolutely no one," Slavin said. "I want to have some people to be there for me when my family literally is in Colorado."

Critics of Greek Life argue that membership dues mean those in sororities or fraternities 'pay for friends.' It's an argument that Dawson Jarman, the president of Charlotte's Panhellenic Executive Board, which is the governing body of Charlotte's sororities, opposes.

"The money that we pay for this experience isn't for our friends, it's for the events that we have," Jarman said. "We can't have philanthropy or sisterhood events without funds to even start them in the first place."

Despite the stereotypes, plenty were happy to pay up for what Jarman and Charlotte's Panhellenic was offering. Bid Night inducted 269, and 'Values Day,' an earlier phase of recruitment, saw a record 332 attendees.

As executive board president, Jarman organizes and oversees recruitment alongside other board members and sorority recruitment counselors.

Still, Jarman says she remembers being in Slavin's shoes three years ago. Before going through recruitment and joining Greek Life, Jar-

man considered transferring after feeling a sense of disconnection and a lack of belonging in her first weeks at UNC Charlotte.

Jarman said it was recruitment, not Bid Day, that had initially eased her disconnection.

"For me, recruitment provided a sense of comfort," Jarman said. Everybody thinks, 'Oh, I'm the only one who feels like this, and nobody else knows what it feels like.' And now, since they have 15 to 20 other girls that they know they can go to and talk to about things during recruitment, it helps make their emotions feel more validated."

Friendship before the envelopes open

That early sense of comfort was evident as the soon-to-be sisters huddled together outside Halton before Bid Night began, sharing excitement or easing each other's nerves.

One of the many making conversation on Tuesday night as anticipation grew was first-year Avery Robinson, who said she had found friends during recruitment.

"Me and my friends, we would wake up early each morning and get ready in each other's rooms for rush and stuff like that," Robinson said. "It was fun eating lunch together between rounds and discussing what we thought. It was all really special."

At UNC Charlotte, sorority recruitment, which Robinson and most others refer to as "rush," is divided into three days: Values Day, Philanthropy Day and Preference Day. Through these stages, new members can learn about the sororities and their members before ranking their top choices.

Breaking up the conversation between Robinson and her recruitment-forged friends was the shouted announcement that they'd be going into Halton to start Bid Night. The announcement was met with cheers, some nervous, others excited, as the women streamed into the arena.

As music pumped through Halton and the nervous group filed into the bleachers in the arena's lower bowl, a quiet crowd of Charlotte's fraternity members gathered in the corners of the arena to watch Bid Day in action.

"I came to show support for the sororities," third-year Saahil Patel said. "I'm also in Greek Life, so it's fun to see how all my friends get new little things and everything."

Patel, who sat with his fraternity brothers, said he originally joined Greek Life for the free food but stayed for the brotherhood he formed with the other members.



"I remember times when, at like 3 a.m., one of my boys would bring me food and caffeine when I was studying for a test in the library," Patel said. "You can always call on somebody if you ever need anything."

Pageantry and preparation on the arena floor

Easing the growing nervousness among the settling crowd, one by one, sororities and their members charged, cheering out of the Halton Arena tunnels before rallying at mid-court and then dashing to a section of bleachers to await the newcomers.

Their mid-court rallies were met with cheers from the hopefuls who sat patiently in the bleachers.

Soon, those newcomers would gather at center court, rip open their envelopes and race to the bleachers where their sororities waited as a part of the "Running Home" Bid Night tradition. But before that moment, they had to sit with their nerves a little longer as envelopes were distributed and UNC Charlotte faculty who had once been part of Greek Life shared words of advice.

Calming nerves and helping manage Bid Day operations was Fontana Ross, vice president of internal and external relations for the Panhellenic Executive Board. Ross wore a white veil, lace gloves and a skirt to match her sorority's theme, "Say 'I Do' to Zeta," as each chapter arrived in coordinated outfits. Other sororities were dressed for NASCAR and ocean themes; one sister came dressed in a lobster costume.

Busy between grabbing photos of excited members-to-be and organizing with other board members, Ross said she joined Greek Life in her second year at Charlotte. Her mother forbade her from joining a sorority, and after a year of convincing, she was allowed to join and says she "flourished" in her sorority.

Now in her third year in Greek Life, Ross says her mom advocates against the stereotypes that once caused her to forbid her daughter from joining.

"This is truly just a place where every woman belongs," Ross said. "It doesn't matter where you're from or your

background. There is no cookie-cutter picture of what a Panhellenic woman is supposed to be."

Cheers, tears and the sprint into sisterhood

To the crowd's relief, the first group of hopefuls was called onto Halton's hardwood floor, forming tight huddles before opening their envelopes. In the circles of sister-to-be, the atmosphere turned quieter than it had been at the arena's entrance, with nerves taking hold. Some women hugged, while others filled the silence with nervous chatter.

At the command of an event organizer, the women were finally given permission to tear into their envelopes and "run home" to their sororities. The signal unleashed one of the loudest cheers Halton may hear all year, as shrieks of excitement resounded through the stands as the new members bolted toward their sororities.

In the frenzy, some women tumbled to the ground, only to be pulled back up by others before continuing their dash.

At the bleachers, sorority members stood waiting with wide smiles and outstretched arms, pulling the newcomers into bear hugs as they celebrated their official welcome into sisterhood.

Posters and name tags were tossed into the air as sisters welcomed new members. Signs displayed messages such as "Bring Twin Home" and "Welcome Home."

Round by round, women were called to

the floor and raced across the hardwood into the arms of their sororities, as the noise and energy inside Halton held steady with each wave of new members met with screams.

Bid Day connections formed before finalized

After revealing her decision and sharing a moment with her new sister, Kayla Martinez got in some extra cardio.

Still smiling after embracing her sisters, she stormed up the stairs of Halton and through the arena's concourse to leap into a hug from her brother, who had attended with their parents and sprinted to his sister to unite.

"I'm excited. I'm so excited, I think I can throw up. Actually, I'm gonna, like, probably puke in a second," first-year Martinez said.

Martinez was the first member of her family to go Greek, but she may have swayed her brother to

do the same.

"I just wanted to hug my sister, it's so cool to see everyone so happy," Jaden Martinez, Kayla's sister, said.

"I'm coming here next year from North Davidson High School. I think I'll definitely join a frat now."

After taking photos, the Martinez family joined the trickle of sisters old and new that left Halton Arena. Sororities walked together as the reds, whites and pinks of their coordinated outfits separated under campus streetlights as they returned to their sorority houses for post-Bid Night festivities.

Charlotte's Panhellenic will return to Halton next year to do it all again and celebrate sisterhood that seems to be formalized rather than formed on Bid Night.



Emmanuel Perkins/Niner Times



Content Warning: This article contains mentions of self harm.

Turning pain into purpose:

How one student-athlete sparked a mental health movement on campus

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor

When third-year student Eve Goldman found herself sitting on the sidelines, injured, watching her teammates play without her, she knew that it was time to bring Morgan's Message to UNC Charlotte's campus.

"I get to help spread the message that just because you're an athlete doesn't mean you have to push through or be strong. You're allowed to have emotions and feelings too," Goldman said.

The inspiration behind bringing Morgan's Message to campus came after Goldman underwent two surgeries for injuries she suffered on the field, before the start of her first year at Charlotte.

One of her injuries was the same as the one the late Morgan Rodgers had, a MCL tear, an injury that can take up to six months to recover from.

While Goldman was able to make a full recovery before starting up her first season on Charlotte's field hockey club team in 2023, she re-injured her right shoulder in the fall of 2024, forcing her to face the choice of undergoing surgery and never playing field hockey again or pushing through.

Goldman leaned on her teammates for comfort and support, guiding her through the hardship of her injury.

"Not everybody has the privilege of walking onto a team and finding family right away," Goldman said. "I wanted to make sure that for athletes dealing with team drama, pressure from coaches or just struggling to balance it all, [they had] somewhere they could go."

With the stress of feeling left behind and injured, Goldman knew it was best for

not only herself but also the greater student-athlete community to have the reminder that their peers might be going through a similar battle.

Goldman became the driving force behind launching the nonprofit's chapter on campus. Morgan's Message, a national organization dedicated to athlete mental health, which quickly found its first home on Field 13, where her team practices and plays.

For Goldman, bringing the chapter on campus was not merely about hosting a game on Field 13; it was about furthering the mission behind Morgan's Message.

Morgan's Message, created in honor of the life of Morgan Rodger, encourages student-athlete communities to "take a shot at mental health." The organization aims to ensure that athletes feel not only seen but heard, so that no one feels as if they have to fight silent battles.

In 2014, Morgan accepted an offer from Duke University to play Division 1 lacrosse, the sport she had grown up with and loved. Throughout her high school years, she played on various high-caliber teams and was recruited early on.

After completing one full season with the team, just 10 days before the first game of her second year with Duke, Morgan suffered a knee injury. Morgan had level three tears in her ACL, MCL and meniscus.

According to the Morgan's Message website, Morgan had difficulty adjusting to sudden changes and felt her confidence decline. Though she appeared positive and resilient to others, she often felt isolated and overwhelmed. On July 11, 2019 Morgan took her own life at the age of 22.

In 2020, Morgan's family, close friends and teammates created Morgan's Message to carry forward her legacy and in hopes of eliminating the stigma surrounding mental health for student athletes at both the collegiate and high school levels.

Within the organization's first five years, there has been a tremendous spread of aware-

ness as a result. After just the first three years, Morgan's Message had over 3,100 student-athlete ambassadors.

Through the organization's online platform, students can access resources such as motivational podcasts, speeches from coaches and even 24/7 licensed clinical support.

Goldman, like other ambassadors, play a key role in making these resources accessible at their schools. They share journals featuring personal stories from athletes, some who returned from injuries, others who sought help or found strength in using their sport as an outlet during difficult times.

Ambassadors are also charged with cultivating safe spaces on their respective campuses. They host monthly meetings where athletes can come together, listen and lean on one another. These gatherings create consistent reminders that no one has to face struggles alone.

At Charlotte, Goldman carries this mission forward as both chapter president and ambassador. She envisions Morgan's Message becoming more than just a club; it's a movement she hopes will become embedded in the University's fabric.

One of her long-term goals is to partner with the University Recreation Center and campus counseling, amplifying awareness and access to mental health resources.

With over 40 active sports clubs on campus, the goal is to have Morgan's Message become a part of every team's values.

"We're a campus that promotes physical activity, but there needs to be an equal emphasis on mental health," Goldman said. "I'd love for athletes to have both a physical therapist and a mental health therapist available to them on campus."

That vision began to gain momentum in spring 2024, when Goldman organized a dedication game in Morgan's honor. Teammates and coaches wore shirts bearing Morgan's Message's butterfly logo, and every stick on the field carried Morgan's emblem.

Following the game, Goldman says other student sports clubs began to take notice and ex-

press interest in bringing Morgan's Message into their own teams.

As a result of the increase in attention on Charlotte's campus, Goldman began the monthly meetings this fall alongside her teammates, Sam Blette, Tarana Ganapathy and Kiana Bolleyer.

"When we had our first meeting [this fall], it was small, just an intro, but I remember thinking, 'Wow, we actually did it,'" Goldman said. "It's not just an idea anymore."

For now, the most rewarding moments are the small ones.

"When someone comes up to me and says, 'This is awesome, this is what we need,' it's surreal," Goldman said. "That's when I know I'm not doing it for nothing."

Suicide Prevention Month

September is recognized as Suicide Prevention Month, a time dedicated to raising awareness, breaking stigma and encouraging open conversations about mental health.

As Sept. 10 marks Suicide Awareness Day, UNC Charlotte student-athletes are reminded through Morgan's Message that it's okay to seek support and rely on their community.

By sharing stories, offering resources and creating spaces for honest dialogue, the initiative highlights that no one has to face their struggles alone and that support, connection and understanding can truly save lives.

Editor's note: If you're struggling, it's okay to share your feelings. The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline number is 988.



Courtesy of UNC Charlotte Morgan's Message Athlete



Racing toward reality: From iRacing to victory lane, Brockton Packard fuels his NASCAR dreams



Courtesy of Packard

Daniel McKoy | Staff Writer

The roaring NASCAR world is an attractive atmosphere for students who want a piece of the fast-paced adrenaline. Sixth-year student Brockton Packard is determined to make his mark in the racing industry.

Packard began college as an engineering major, but chemistry courses proved to be a hurdle. Rather than giving up on his NASCAR dream, he redirected his focus to communications studies with a concentration in media and technology, while also working on a math minor to stay connected to his long-term engineering ambitions.

Packard is utilizing all the resources available to achieve his goals, including iRacing—the most popular and accessible commercial racing simulation on the market.

He serves as the iRacing team manager for Niner Esports and works as the Game Center attendant in the newly opened Esports & Gaming Lounge in the Popp-Martin Student Union.

iRacing and simulator racing have transformed the sport by giving aspiring drivers, engineers and fans a chance to get behind the wheel virtually. Several professional drivers, including William Byron, have popularized the pathway. Future engineers also gain valuable experience through the service.

Packard has been on iRacing for seven years, learning not just how to race but also how to build and adjust car setups.

“It teaches you not only racecraft, how to build setups and what certain things do to certain cars,” Packard said. “The super late model is a totally different beast from a [NASCAR] truck

or an Xfinity car, and that’s a totally different world to open build cars. So it teaches you to be versatile, and I mean, if you’re racing around 40 other guys and you’re managing fuel mileage and tire wear and the runs coming from behind you, you’re multitasking.”

With an iRacing subscription, users have access to hundreds of cars and tracks that replicate nearly every aspect of a real race weekend.

The road to victory lane

Packard’s taste of racing and car setup building on iRacing fueled his lifelong dream of working in NASCAR.

He began his professional career at Reaume Brothers Racing (RBR), where he learned the ropes of the routine cycles and the expectations that come with working on a race team.

Building on that experience, he posted on Facebook about his background and passion for NASCAR. Jordan Anderson, owner of NASCAR Xfinity Series team Jordan Anderson Racing (JAR), saw the post and offered him a position as race engineer.

At JAR, Packard optimized tire sets, worked on car setups during the week and handled data analysis at the track. On just his third race on the job, his team earned its first-ever victory at the Talladega Superspeedway.

“It was a little bit surreal... I’ve been on the other side of the fence so many times, saying, ‘I’m gonna be there one day.’ And then all of a sudden, you know, [it was my] third race on top of the

box as a race engineer, we’re leading at Talladega and we won, and it’s a crazy emotion,” Packard said. “You don’t believe it at that point. You’re like, ‘something’s gonna happen. We’re gonna fail post race,’ but standing in victory lane, seeing the car, seeing the team, it definitely drives you to push more.”

He is currently with Rackley-Willie Allen Racing where he operates 3D modeling systems for their NASCAR Truck Series and Pro Late Model programs.

Managing the iRacing Esports teams

After leaving JAR in March, Packard has taken on a new leadership role in Charlotte’s Esports community. He manages the iRacing team for Niner Esports, is working to build a Charlotte Esports program and serves as a Game Center attendant in the University’s Esports & Gaming Lounge.

The space is free for all students and currently houses one iRacing rig, with a second in the works.

“The school’s been great to us,” Packard said. “They’ve given us a space to create and grow a community. There’s always room for improvement. Right now, this is a great start.”

Packard mentors 15 other students through the Collegiate iRacing League (CiL) and is adding eNASCAR College iRacing Series to Charlotte’s schedule. With 15 students, Charlotte now holds the record for the largest collegiate team in eNASCAR history.

The communication skills he’s developed in the classroom have been crucial in managing the team.

“Helping the guys with some public speaking stuff on the off chance to get interviewed,” Packard said. “Trying not to say anything stupid over the radio kind of thing...The communication side is really, truly just being able to talk to and understand, like, ‘Hey, there’s no pressure. Just run what you brought, and we’ll all figure it out.’ I think that it’s more of a people aspect than any specific thing that I’ve learned so far.”

The first eNASCAR iRacing College Series race for the 2025-2026 season will be on Sept. 17.

What the future holds

The main goal for Packard has always been to work on the engineering side of NASCAR. To prepare, he is pursuing a math minor as a bridge toward an engineering associate’s degree at Central Piedmont Community College.

His plan is to later return to UNC Charlotte to earn a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering—credentials that could open doors with powerhouse teams like Hendrick Motorsports and Joe Gibbs Racing in the NASCAR Cup Series, or JR Motorsports in the Xfinity Series.

For now, Packard continues to balance his studies, esports leadership and professional racing opportunities—using iRacing as both a training tool and a launching pad for his NASCAR career.

Opinion: ChatGPT fuels learner insecurity

Cory Nguyen | Lead Writer

There is a rising temptation to copy that essay prompt into that Large Language Model (LLM) textbox, which many simply know as ChatGPT (OpenAI-owned) or other models that fly in and out of the trendy tech space, like Google's Gemini or Liang Wenfeng's DeepSeek.

If not an essay, then paste a math problem, a resume or a task that requires the complex thought of a human being to get back a generic answer.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) may be an efficient tool to increase productivity, utilizing mathematical trends to produce average responses, but that productivity comes at the expense of the prime emotional and mental learning conditions that students require.

An example would be Reddit user Informal-Yard7336's take that AI increased their ability to do market research, code, game and write long-form content. However, this comes with the assumption that without AI, this Reddit user would not be able to do it all.

Industries seek not to resolve the root of why AI is infecting every facet of daily life. This is driven by the insatiable need for inhuman

productivity and a socio-economic system focused on currency rather than happiness.

For example, Bhutan is a country that uses a happiness index to measure society's growth and success. There is recognition that there is more to life than maximum productivity at sustainability's expense, and active dialogue to integrate this concept throughout the country.

Instead, AI has become a band-aid to ignore the unrealistic expectations of human efficiency alongside the devaluation of the average person's contribution to society.

Another Redditor, cheesomacitis, shared a story detailing that AI took their occupation of a Spanish-to-English translator after 20 years, highlighting the "easy-to-replace" attitude regarding human work.

Many students face this issue. The pressure to keep up academically supersedes their ability to learn and value their work effectively. Systems centered on quantity over quality: massive lecture halls, poorly organized classrooms and underfunded staff, highlight that the value of American higher education is in getting students in and out, not active learning.

In this environment, students are not inclined to study and build conviction, but to get work submitted on time to secure their future livelihood, at any cost. This breeds academic integrity instability and a fragile cohort lacking in confidence to think and do for themselves.

Not only does this feed learning insecurity within individuals, but it can foster unreliability within an entire organization if, within enough people, independent thought is left unprioritized.

An example of this risk has been shown in a recent Harvard study documenting an increase in productivity but a decrease in motivation in those who use AI. This disinterest puts organiza-

tions at risk for a lack of morale and willingness to contribute unique and meaningful work.

Further, the planet's health will continue to deteriorate with unregulated AI usage.

Increased energy demands and resource consumption from data centers increase environmental impact, as the current American electricity infrastructure relies on 60% of fossil fuels.

Students should not feel the need to risk the planet or their rectitude to sustain a system bent on disheartening them.

Implementing an academic structure that fosters learning, comprehension and sustainability should be the top priority for any educational institution. Resolving not just the overabundant usage of AI, but also fossil fuels, data and the distrust instilled in learners.

Educated and confident people are good for any

system destined to survive long-term. Facilitating an environment that encourages students in this way may be the most holistic solution to reducing students' overreliance on AI and the devaluation of our fellow humans.

Read more at
[ninertimes.com](https://www.ninertimes.com)



Emma Cathey/Niner Times

Opinion: Charlotte needs better representation in Raleigh

Jackson Rheinbolt | Contributor

What makes a member of the legislature truly representative of their constituents? Is it advocating for the preservation of their constituents' rights? Is it consistently voting with the party they were elected for? Is it rejecting attempts to expropriate the common man by malicious corporate actors?

The current state representative of North Carolina's 99th district (of which the UNC Charlotte campus is a part) is Nasif Majeed, and if he were held to any of the aforementioned standards, he would not be in the position of power that he currently occupies. He is not the representative this University and its surrounding areas need nor deserve.

Majeed has been the representative of the 99th district since 2019, when he defeated incumbent Rodney Moore in part due to the Moores's campaign financing scandal. Majeed advertises as being concerned with housing costs and teachers' pay. In a questionnaire issued by the Charlotte Observer, when asked whether Majeed disagrees with any policies his party holds, he responded 'no.' This statement is, as of now, an abject falsehood, although it rang true in the initial stages of his career in the N.C. House.

Majeed's first moves in Raleigh concerned hate crimes, culminating in his introduction of a bill to increase the

penalty for a hate crime from a misdemeanor to a felony. A Republican-controlled committee shot down this bill, and it remains his only newsworthy political maneuver. That is, until just over a month ago.

On July 29, several previously vetoed bills stood for a potential override, pending approval by the NC House. These bills were Republican-backed and had passed with ease due to their simple majority in Raleigh. The only issue they faced in passing was that the Governorship is currently held by Josh Stein, a Democrat, meaning the bills were subject to veto.

In years past, this was an easy thing to overturn as Republicans held over three-fifths of both chambers and regularly overrode former governor and now Senator-hopeful Roy Cooper's vetoes. However, Democrats flipped a couple of seats in the 2024 election, meaning that they now had enough votes to buffer any attempts to

override a veto, with a couple of caveats. One of these caveats is that Democrats could defect, which would bring an end to the idea of complete solidarity against Republican lawmaking. On July 29, that proviso came into play, and Majeed crossed the picket line.

The two bills that Majeed helped pass exemplify why he does not deserve to represent anyone in the state of North Carolina, much less the city of Charlotte. The first, H.B. 805 (H.B. standing for House Bill, and S.B. for Senate Bill), was originally only supposed to target digital sexual exploitation, only to be later expanded and used to attack transgender rights as well as classroom reading material.

Majeed was absent during the initial passing of the bill, only to stand fully behind it when it mattered most. A survey conducted by the *Niner Times* last year indicated that over 29% of

LGBTQ+ respondents have experienced harassment due to their identity, a statistic that can only grow when hate is made law.

The other bill is S.B. 266. This bill serves to rescue Duke Energy from its failures to engage in emission reduction, as well as provide it a mechanism to charge customers for power plants that have not even been built yet. It deals in nothing but negatives for everyone but Duke Energy executives, yet Majeed waved it through. He claims on his website to support efforts to make life more affordable, yet when those bills fail and another is passed by him that skyrockets electricity bills, how can he stand behind these claims?

Majeed is no hardcore conservative, but that should not be the bar for Democrats in North Carolina. When representing progressives, there are no excuses for not voting progressive, and there are especially no excuses for voting to restrict the rights of your constituents.

Nasif Majeed represents a huge public university, yet he voted to damage teacher autonomy. Nasif Majeed represents transgender individuals, yet he voted to deny their existence. Nasif Majeed represents people who are living paycheck to paycheck, yet he voted to raise their electricity bill. He faces a primary next year, which means it's time to vote on Nasif Majeed. This time,

Charlotte should raise their voice and issue a vote that demarcates a resounding no.



Ava Weaver/Niner Times & Niner Times File

Opinion: People fear the public, not transit

Noah Hughey | Lead Writer

If you live in Charlotte, the light rail is one of two things: It could be a gimmick to exploit on Carolina Panthers game days and New Year's Eve, getting as wasted as you want without fear of being pulled over. Or, it is a suffocating nightmare, trapping you with strangers whose mental state and intentions for the ride are a total mystery to you. What people fail to understand is that it's that mystery, not some essential truth of public transit, that breeds the fear of the light rail and lessens the quality of the ride for everyone.

A panicked hush has swallowed the city of Charlotte after a man fatally stabbed a woman on the LYNX Blue Line two weeks ago. Charlotte's less-than-savory reputation for safety has collided with an anti-transit sentiment that paints the mode of transportation as being innately more dangerous than cars. The problem with this claim is that on a factual level, it simply is not correct.

According to data published in April of 2025, driving a car is more dangerous both in terms

of crash fatalities and incidents of serious crime. On the side of crashes, public transit's death and injury rate was one-tenth of that of car travel.

The total reportable incidents of major crimes such as assault, robbery and homicide are all on a steep downward trend, with homicides amounting to less than 10 incidents in 2023. Conversely, crime on the road has only gone up, with motor vehicle theft shooting past one million incidents in 2023 and road rage incidents involving guns killing 100 people that year, wounding an additional 300-400 people.

And yet, opponents of transit have capitalized on high-profile incidents such as Charlotte's recent stabbing to highlight the detriment of transit compared to the safety and security of car ownership. In a disturbing way, their hubristic rejection of the evidence on transit safety collides with other half-baked assumptions. One local influencer, who goes by the handle "travel.yoga.megan," posted a video on TikTok calling homeless people, by and large, "dangerous."

It's one thing to wrongly advocate against the light rail as being more dangerous than cars. It's an entirely different thing to, as travel.yoga.megan did, say, "If you've been to, like, Florida or New York or other places where there's a huge homeless population, people know not to mess with those people; they are dangerous people, like, you gotta wake up."

This is a tourist's view of the general danger the homeless present to the public. Worse, it intersects with the sterilized, corporate narratives many of these South End yuppies have about these issues. To them, the problem is not that our city was built only for the wealthy to survive, lacking the necessary and proper social infrastructure to prevent homelessness in the first place, but that those victimized by our system are in their way.

Some commenters shared a valid concern. The kind of rhetoric travel.yoga.megan was sharing wasn't just superfluously villainizing all homeless people; it was also teetering on racist essentialism used to justify the inferiority of Black people, Black men in particular, because of their homelessness.

Once again, the facts do not align with the simple narratives the dissent is pushing. A

2022 study of wrongful convictions stretching back to 1989 saw that Black Americans were seven times more likely to be falsely convicted of serious crimes. Sixty percent of the wrongly convicted people that non-profits like the Innocence Project have exonerated since 1992 were Black.

But if its lackluster evidence is not enough to discredit this view, take travel.yoga.megan's comment from the original video: "Also, I don't believe this was covered on the news, I found this on Twitter... so, just try to get real information out here people, like, they're not gonna tell you these things."

The stabbing was featured in multiple stories by The Charlotte Observer, WCNC, WSOC TV, WFAE, WBTV, QC News and even garnered national attention from Fox News and The Independent. This story was many things, but not covered is not one of them. It is the very fact that this story is such a big deal that shows the stabbing was an exception that proves the rule.

You know what stories do not get regular national attention? Car crashes and road rage. There is no light rail stabbing section in the Observer because it does not happen hundreds of times a day. And yet public attention only ever promotes the light rail when someone is hurt. Its image to prospective riders becomes skewed, scaring them away.

Likewise, public attention on the danger of car dependency, alongside its general badness for driver mental health, physical health and the planet, is skewed away. We ignore larger trends in the data that prove its danger and focus instead on the individual feeling of safety when we lock ourselves away in a metal box where no one can see us or talk to us.

This false security, and the 'independence' it breeds, allows us to ignore society and its problems. It gives us the social capital to ignore issues like homelessness and transit quality because we are not affected by them immediately. But this world we live in behind the wheels of our cars is a lie.

It's time to wake up and smell the coffee. Cars are only 'safer' and more 'efficient' because they are built for socially isolating people, protecting us from what we really fear: the general public.

Whether or not drivers want to accept it, dealing with other people is the central part of being in society. They cannot continue to extract the benefits of an unjust system while ignoring the harm it is causing, harm they complain about when it interrupts their commute.

If we really care about the issues that created the tragedy that occurred on our light rail, we have to get involved, not drive past with the doors locked. Being a keyboard warrior against transit and the homeless does not make the train safer or provide the resources to get people off the street.

Get involved with Sustain Charlotte to advocate for more, better quality transit options. Donate to the National Alliance on Mental Illness or Roof Above to help provide mental health and housing resources to those impacted by homelessness. Vote in Mecklenburg County's November elections. If you want the public to be a place worth showing up at, show up for it.



Blaise Uy/Niner Times



CHARLOTTE FILM FESTIVAL is back at
the Independent Picture House Sept 23-28!



You'll get to discover bold, original films you won't find anywhere else, often with the filmmakers right there to talk about their work. The energy is electric: audiences are passionate, screenings feel special, and every conversation could lead to a new idea or connection. Whether you're in line chatting about what you just saw, attending a Q&A, or bumping into a director at the concession stand, festivals make film feel alive and personal. It's a celebration of creativity, community,



Indie artists take the stage for Raleigh's Hopscotch Music Festival

Wes Packham | Arts & Culture Editor

