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Must-have spring drinks on and off campus

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor
Aisha Karim/Niner Times



There is honestly nothing better than a fun beverage as a pick-me-up during a long school day.

On campus, it is genuinely a challenge not to stop at one of the various places available for a “well-deserved” sweet treat.

But if you are new to the Charlotte community and need help finding the must-haves, here is a list to set you up for success.

What’s on campus?

The Boba Tea Bar Truck

I know you have all seen the one and only Boba Bar Tea Truck on campus, sitting near Prospector. After classes on a Tuesday, and I’m feeling my bed calling, when I turn the corner and see the Boba Truck, it is like a beacon of hope. The Boba Truck is worth every penny and every bit of praise.

Strawberry fruit tea with cherry popping boba, brown sugar matcha with traditional tapioca pearls and the blue lagoon “special-tea,” which is just the perfect amount of sweetness, should all be next on your list to try.

But these aren’t the only drinks from the infamous Boba Truck; they also offer several milk tea options, like classic tiger milk tea and taro tea. They even have over five different matcha flavor variations, from fruity ones like strawberry and blueberry to refreshing rose and lavender.

And just when you thought it can’t get better, it does. The Boba Bar Truck has a “loyal-tea” rewards member program, where you can

scan and get a boba stamp every time you visit. After a certain number of stamps, you can earn rewards such as a free topping or even a free drink.

Thoughtful Cup

I used to think everyone slept on Thoughtful Cup and forgot about it. The cafe that sits at the bottom of the Fretwell building, but after seeing the lines in the morning when I thought I would have time to grab a quick iced latte, I was surely mistaken.

Sometimes you have to go back to the basics, and Thoughtful Cup gets the job done with the simple yet delicious drinks.

An iced vanilla latte or an iced chai latte from Thoughtful Cup is honestly at the top of my guilty-pleasure list, and the reason my bank account wants me to stay far away from the bottom floor of Fretwell.

While chai is typically a winter or fall beverage, it should be embraced year-round. It’s hard to mess up, always tasty and reliable.

If in need of a really strong kick of caffeine in the morning, the mocha latte from Thoughtful Cup will set you straight.

Starbucks

And of course, no campus drink guide would be complete without Starbucks. I have seen exams taken in less time than people are willing to wait for their beloved beverage at one of the Starbucks on campus.

When spring hits, the go-to order has to be the strawberry acai re-

frsher, that’s non-negotiable.

It’s light, fruity and gives just enough caffeine to keep you awake through that afternoon lecture without feeling heavy.

The drink is the perfect “I need something refreshing but still energizing” drink. Bonus points if you add lemonade for that extra tangy kick, minus points if you take out the strawberries.

If you’re more of a coffee person but still want something that feels seasonal, the brown sugar oatmilk shaken espresso is a must. Try saying that five times fast. It’s smooth, slightly sweet and has just the right amount of cinnamon to make it interesting without overpowering the espresso. This is actually the drink that got me to like coffee.

Off-campus staples

First, let’s talk about Poppi’s probiotic soda. If you haven’t tried it yet, consider this your sign to go to your nearest grocer. It’s like a soda but also gives that “I’m taking care of my gut health” bonus that makes you feel slightly more responsible.

The raspberry rose flavor. Elite. It’s become a problem to find them in stores because they’re just too good.

And this might sound controversial, but hot tea deserves more hype, even in the spring. Something about holding a warm cup of green tea, chamomile or even a fruity herbal blend just feels calming in the middle of a chaotic week.

Hot tea is underrated; it’s comforting, and it makes you feel like you have your life together, even if you absolutely do not.

Guide: How to find your footing after the freeze

Claire Mitchell | Staff Writer

After two weekends of snow-induced chaos, missed days and classes shifting from in-person to virtual, the “fresh start” feeling of a new semester has been replaced by a sense of disorder.

As UNC Charlotte students re-adjust to our typical pace, it is easy to feel out of sorts. In this guide, we dive into practical ways you can recenter your routine and reclaim your momentum just in time for midterms.

The physical reset

Being cooped up in a dorm or apartment for two consecutive weekends can quickly lead to a lack of motivation. While we technically had more time at home, unprompted breaks often allow laziness to creep in. Resetting your physical environment acts as a stepping stone for productivity in other facets of your life. Cleaning isn't always appealing and can feel daunting, so here are a few ways to make the “big reset” more manageable.



Actionable steps

The Pomodoro Method: Set a timer for 25 minutes. When the timer is up, take a five-minute break before returning to your tasks. This can help you stay focused for long periods of time.

Add a soundtrack: Put on your favorite album or podcast. Listening to a high-energy artist always lightens the mood and makes mundane chores feel a bit more whimsical.

Declutter: Begin by straightening rogue items and scattered clothes before jumping into time-consuming deep cleaning.

Focus on high-traffic areas: Declutter the areas you use most, like your desk or your bedside table. Keeping these spots organized reduces that “visual noise” that can overwhelm you.

One thing at a time: Don't feel like you have to scrub the baseboards to be successful. Set a clear, singular goal, like cleaning one dedicated space, and call it a win.

The school check-in

Due dates have likely shifted amidst the snowy chaos, so checking in on your syllabi, emails and classmates is a vital move.

Cross-reference your original class calendars with any new Canvas updates to ensure no “hidden” assignments slip through the cracks



during the transition back to in-person learning.

Take a moment to sort through your inbox and Canvas announcements to make sure you are up to date on all NinerAlerts and specific messages from your professors. If things still feel blurry, don't hesitate to message a classmate to confirm you aren't missing any surprise announcements.

Social reentry

Isolation during snow days can be a productivity killer. Now that the roads are cleared and the light rail is back to its normal schedule, it's time to break the cycle of “bedroom-to-kitchen” loops. Schedule a study date at a local coffee shop or head over to the J. Murrey Atkins Library.

Moving your “office” out of your living space helps re-establish the psychological boundary between rest and work. Getting back into the campus atmosphere is the best way to remind yourself that the semester is still in motion.

While the snow might have put a temporary freeze on our schedules, it doesn't have to define the rest of your semester. By taking small steps to clear your space, your inbox and your head, you can transition back into the best version of you. Stay warm, stay organized and let's get back to it.



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Guide: How to budget for spring

Madeline Andrews | Arts & Culture Editor

If you are anything like me, when the weather starts to get warmer, you are overcome with an intense urge to spend copious amounts of money. Since the earth is renewing itself, why can't I renew my entire wardrobe? Although it may seem tempting to adopt the age-old adage 'out with the old, in with the new,' you may want to adopt a budget to help protect your wallet. Here are some penny-pinching tips to help you enjoy the spring without having to file for bankruptcy.

Give each dollar a job

This method was coined by the famous debt-free finance personality Dave Ramsey. Although he has a lot of outdated financial opinions, the root of this concept has helped me stay above water through college. Giving every dollar a job means being aware of all of the money coming in and where you plan to spend it.

Imagine your money is a collection of unemployed dollar bills, assign a few (more like a few hundred) to go to groceries, others are assigned to pay for gas and the rest fit into other categories of spending. Picturing your money as individual aspects of a larger spending goal helps to personify it, so you'll feel really bad setting it on fire during your third weekly Wingstop visit.

Prioritize your fun

When spring comes around, there are suddenly boundless opportunities to hit the beach for spring break, go to top golf after midterms, or spend Saturday in Concord Mills trying on dresses. We all want things, especially fun things, but if we were to indulge in every fun activity or new item, our debit cards would quickly decline.

Living in moderation conceptually feels both boring and sad; we have all told ourselves we "deserve a little treat," to provide just enough cognitive dissonance to make the unnecessary purchase. However, planning out the big trips and the birthday gifts will actually allow for more fun, not less.

Booking your spring break flights and researching affordable commencement outfits reduces the stress of financial mystery, leaving more time to make memories while avoiding consumer debt. Setting aside money for events that you are excited about puts it in the front of your mind, making it easier to avoid instant gratification in the pursuit of something big that you're looking forward to.

You don't need it new

You too may be able to go without when it comes to a night out or a

weekend getaway, but sometimes you really do need new socks or an outfit for a job interview. Remember to look for cheaper options before you head straight to the Louis Vuitton in South Park.

If you've got a career fair coming up, head to the Professional Closet in the Career Center. It is stocked with professional clothes, shoes and accessories all at zero cost to students. No appointment required.

For other second-hand clothes, check out the local Goodwill, Salvation Army, Plato's closet and you may be able to borrow something from a friend or roommate—just don't go digging in their drawers without asking first.

If you need any housewares, from kitchen appliances to a bathroom plunger, try discount department stores like HomeGoods, "TJ Maxx", and Marshalls. Their prices are usually tens of dollars cheaper than Target or Walmart.

All in all, the goal of a spring budget is to make your life more fun, and saving money now will help you live carefree in the sun come summer break. Regardless of whether you're saving for vacation or a post-grad apartment, knowing where your money is going is the secret to full independence.



Ava Weaver/Niner Times File



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Celebrating spring: Events on UNC Charlotte's campus and city of Charlotte

Giselle Jimenez Del-Carmen | Asst. News Editor

After a long winter with snowstorms, spring will begin in March and last through June as temperatures warm. What better way to celebrate the warmth than with events found on and off UNC Charlotte's campus?

From a wine festival to spring hikes, below is a list of on-campus events to explore before taking advantage of the city of Charlotte during the warmer season.

10th Annual University City Wine Festival

Hosted at the Boardwalk of the Shoppes at University Place, the University City Wine Festival will return on April 11, 2026, from 1 to 6 p.m.

The festival will feature more than 100 wines from 25 wineries, along with cocktails, craft beers and ciders from around Charlotte for attendees to enjoy as they stroll the boardwalk.

Additionally, the wine tasting will be accompanied by food, music and interactive entertainment. To participate, tickets must be purchased on their website. Admission options offer different experiences, but all include access to all festival sampling.

Queen City Holi

Hosted by Queen City Desi, this spring festival celebrating colors and the spring season will be hosted at Victoria Yards in Charlotte on March 7 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The festival will feature DJs who will bring a variety of music from Bollywood to EDM to South Indian anthems.

Food, beverages and desserts will also be provided alongside the music. Tickets must be purchased; early-bird tickets are already available on their website.

Panda Fest

The Panda Fest is a large outdoor Asian food festival with experiential activities, tastings, and market fairs, hosted on April 17-19, with each day held at different hours. Details are available on their website.

Located on Route 29, Pavilion 5650 Sandusky Blvd. Concord, more than 80 Asian food vendors will offer a variety of Asian street food and merchandise. Tickets must be purchased for the festival.

CAB Mardi Gras Masquerade

This event will be hosted by the Campus Activities Board (CAB) on Feb. 19 from 6 to 9 p.m. in the Lucas Room 341 of the Cone University Center.

The mini festival will feature Mardi Gras-themed mask decorating, necklace and bracelet making. Food will be featured, including beignets and funnel cakes, alongside psychic, tarot and palm readers.

Students may RSVP for the event through Niner Engage.

Spring Flowers Hike

Hosted by the Venture Outdoor Leadership office, this hike will take place in the N.C. mountains on April 25 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Designed for both beginners and experienced hikers, adventure trip leaders will be guiding and teaching the hike for spring flowers.

Registration, which includes information on how to purchase tickets, is available through Niner Engage with costs covering transportation, meals, equipment, technical clothing and instruction.

Registration is due April 22 at noon. Costs vary based on student or faculty/staff status.



Niner Times File

Four North Carolina birds coming to your balcony this spring

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

There isn't a better spring wakeup call than the chirp of a feathered friend. Outside your window upon sunrise, or in the trees as you walk to class, the singsong chime of birds in the air welcomes us to spring after a cold, shuttered winter.

Mourning Dove

These birds are known as prolific breeders and are abundant across the U.S. But don't get the impression that these slender-tailed grey birds are promiscuous; Mourning Doves are monogamous and often mate for life.

Mourning Doves get their name from the low "coo" sounds these birds make, which early listeners found sad.

Despite their somewhat bulky size, Mourning Doves have been found to be laid-back birds and often will take a back seat in bird battles for food or breeding grounds. While they avoid disputes, Mourning Doves have high mortality rates; it is estimated that between 50% to 65% of all Mourning Doves die annually. Still, when conditions are

right, these birds can live to be quite old. In 1998, a 30-year-old Mourning Dove was found; the other birds in this article live only about 15 years.

American Goldfinch

Matching the yellows that we have for so long associated with springs is the American Goldfinch. Be sure not to mistake this bird for the yellow-rumped warbler, which has yellow markings on its throat and under its wings. The goldfinch is almost entirely yellow, except for its black-and-white crown and wings. Goldfinches are vegetarians and stick to a strict seed-only diet, so they're easy to attract to bird feeders. During the summer, male goldfinches turn bright yellow while females take on a duller brown.

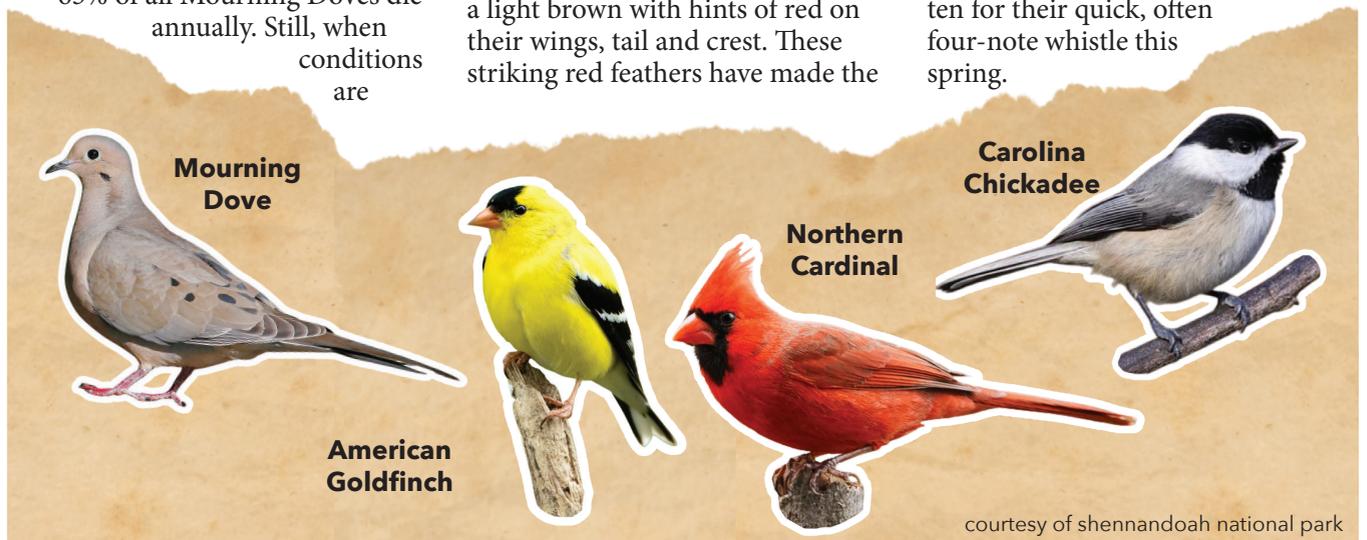
Northern Cardinal

North Carolina's state bird for a reason, the Northern Cardinal is hard to miss and abundant in North Carolina yards. Male cardinals are a distinct, crimson with a black mask, while female cardinals are a light brown with hints of red on their wings, tail and crest. These striking red feathers have made the

Northern Cardinal a popular choice in the U.S. Seven U.S. states have the Northern Cardinal as their state bird: Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, Virginia and West Virginia. Because of those crimson coats, a group of cardinals is called a "college," "conclave" or "Vatican." During the spring and early summer, during their breeding season, these birds get protective and will attack their own reflections in windows, car mirrors and other shiny surfaces.

Carolina Chickadee

Known for its black cap, white cheeks and grey body, the Carolina Chickadee is a plump little bird abundant in the Southeastern United States. Unlike squirrels, which are known to forget acorns or nuts they've buried for the winter, chickadees are known to have brilliant memories and can find stashed away food months after they've buried it. Carolina Chickadees do not migrate and sometimes will mate for life, so a strong memory comes in handy during harsh winters. Listen for their quick, often four-note whistle this spring.



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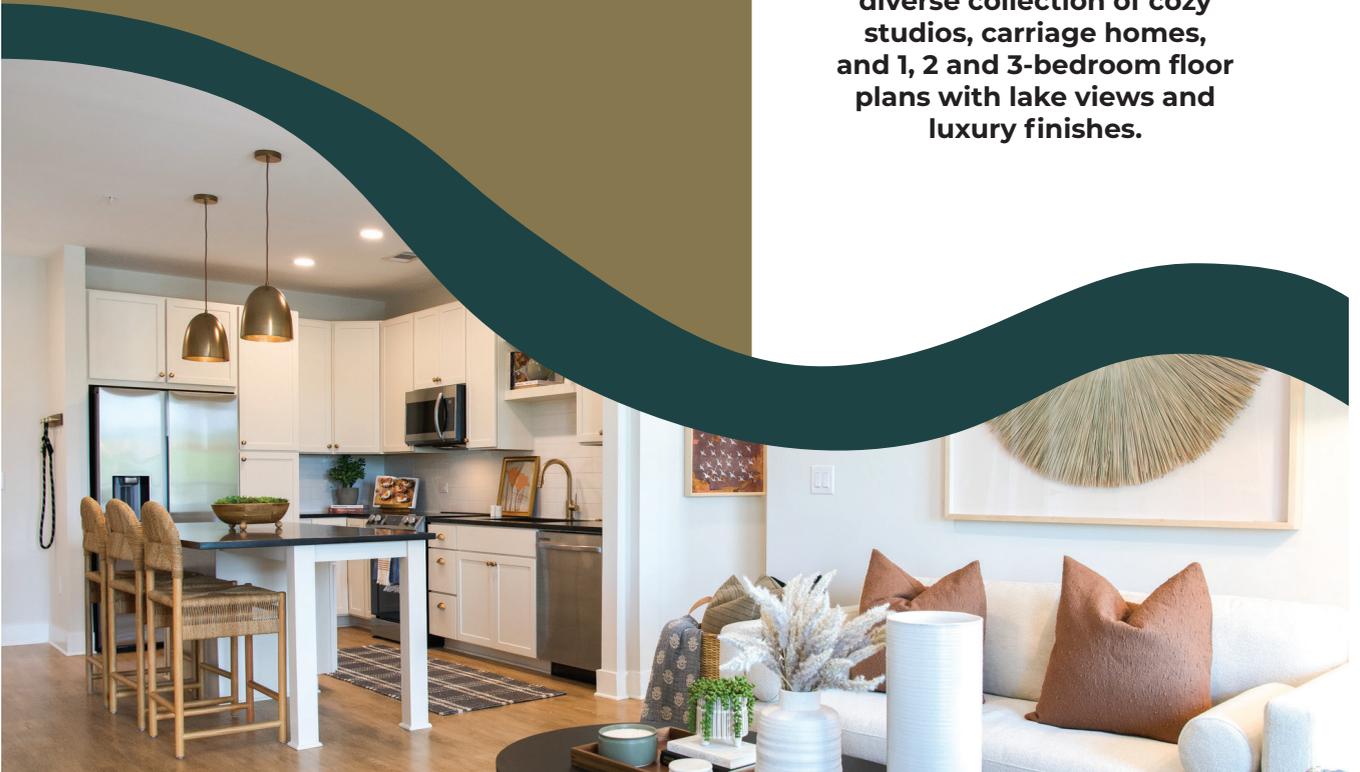
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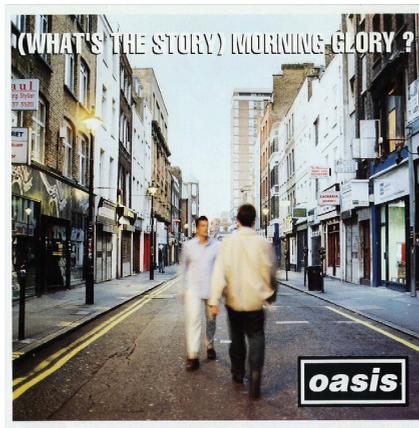
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The sound of spring: Niner Times editors pick three seasonal albums

Davis Cuffe, Emsley Jackson & Mareska Chettiar

Courtesy of Creation Records, Luke Chiang & Duophonic Records

In college, spring is fleeting. Just as the snow melts and the sun begins to shine, you're thrust into exam season, and then, summer has begun. Still, you can savor spring with these three albums selected by Niner Times editors.

Davis Cuffe:

Stereolab- *Dots and Loops*

As much as I'd love to be edgy and make some remark about how spring is nothing without the suffering of winter and the rot of the sun shining on what's been in the dark for so long, spring is overall quite lovely.

To pair with that euphoric feeling when the sun meets your skin for the first time after the winter's freeze, I give you Stereolab's "Dots and Loops."

There isn't much lyrical content to analyze here — Laetitia Sadier, the band's lead vocalist, uses her voice as more of an instrument than a vessel for storytelling — think Cocoteau Twins or Beach House if they were happy. Sadier's sweet vocals pair perfectly with the album's snap-

py and upbeat production. Plainly, the album is a nice vibe. It's warm, positive and should be a mainstay in your spring rotation.

Emsley Jackson:

Oasis- (*What's the Story*) *Morning Glory*

Released in the fall of 1995, the sophomore album from the British band Oasis rings spring to me. With thought-evoking stretches of sound and rocking Manchester accents, the songs feel like standing at the edge of something, but you aren't sure of just what yet. Spring is the same; thawing ground with burgeoning life lying in wait.

Tracks like "Don't Look Back in Anger" and "Morning Glory" scream emotional reawakening — the production is bright and open. This is not introspective winter music, but the kind you roll down the windows and flail your arms to. Most importantly, this album has an optimistic edge. The messy kind that you roll up your sleeves and dust the cobwebs out with during spring cleaning. "Some Might Say" and "Roll With It" capture the feeling

that things may just work out, and with warmer, longer days on the horizon, we all need some of that.

Mareska Chettiar:

Luke Chiang- *Typhoon*

"Typhoon" is Luke Chiang's latest release featuring his iconic R&B sound, blending real-life soundbites and touching lyrics to create an album centering family, love and struggle.

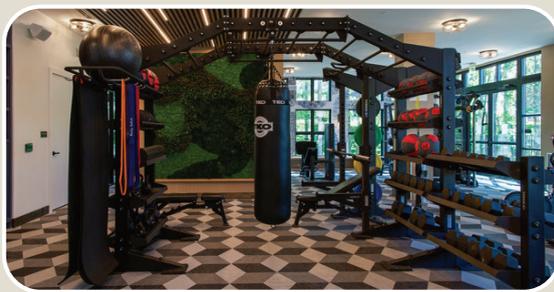
The first track, "twenty something," starts with a soundbite from what seems like a warm interaction between a parent and a child, before Chiang recalls moments from his childhood, accompanied by a slow acoustic guitar and bass. The songs that follow are all tastes of Chiang's unique R&B style, creating a soundscape that rises and dives but keeps you hooked.

This album's homage to family, life's struggles and companionship makes it a great addition to a slow spring morning. It's the perfect mix of beautiful sound with lyrical depth, enough to provoke thought but not overwhelm.



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Emsley Jackson | Opinion Editor

Niner Times File

Opinion: Go outside!

Since the dawn of time, humans have known that sunlight equals happiness. Cavemen and their saber-toothed counterparts spent their days blissfully blistering out in the open, moving to the rhythm of the rising and setting sun. For the ancient Inca civilization, the sun was considered the creator of the whole world. In the early 1900s, Niels Ryberg Finsen was awarded the Nobel Prize for recognizing sunlight's role in treating diseases and for pioneering light therapy as a legitimate medical treatment. Even now, any doctor will tell you, at the first sign of abnormality in the body, it might help to get outside and get more Vitamin D and fresh air.

So why have we as a culture stopped photosynthesizing?

Somewhere between the dinosaurs and the present day, getting fresh air became more of a "to-do" than an unconscious urge. You can blame air conditioning, cell phones

and COVID-19, or you can proactively take strides to spend more time outdoors.

UNC Charlotte is a green oasis amongst the bustling and ever-sprawling metropolis of the city of Charlotte. Behind a curtain of foliage, our campus is an escape from concrete monotony. Take advantage of the green lawns, ample outdoor seating, tree canopies and empty hammocks scattered across campus. Make small changes. Take the long route to your classes or to your car; let the winter sun melt your seasonally depressed facade. Ten minutes outdoors will brighten your day.

"In general, you typically need much less direct sunlight than you might think ... but even 10 to 30 minutes of sun exposure on bare skin can start to impact levels in a positive way," as reported by Dr. Charles Garvin, MD, and the Cleveland Clinic in an article on the health benefits of sunshine. "Sun-

light exposure provides essential vitamin D and helps boost everything from your mood and energy level to your ability to sleep well at night."

I know it's still chilly, and hard to believe, but spring will soon be in action. Who cares what that groundhog has to say? Shoutout to all of the meteorology majors out there, he's a wannabe.

Aside from the pollen onslaught at the start of the season, spring in North Carolina is a beautiful showcase of life as it should be. Picture it now: blooming flowers, bees buzzing, sweet winds blowing and creatures of habit slowly coming out of hibernation.

Show some appreciation for Mother Nature's tireless efforts this spring and spend more time in the great outdoors. Your caveman ancestors would be grunting in approval.