

Nouveau Now



More on page 8
UNC Charlotte showcase
inspires love for
historical performing arts

NINERTIMES

Student-driven news since 1947 April 1, 2026

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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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UNC Charlotte events calendar

Hechenbleikner Lake Day
April 1, 2 - 6 p.m.
Hechenbleikner Lake

Consent Carnival
April 2, 4 - 6 p.m.
SoVi Terrace

The Riffers 2nd Annual Riff-Off
April 4, 6:45 p.m.
McKnight Hall

Media Literacy Matters Conference: Empowering Critical Thinkers in a Digital World
April 2, 8:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
J. Murrey Atkins Library - Halton Room

Legendary x Niner Notes Presents: Wild N' Out
April 3, 7:30 p.m.
McKnight Hall

Charlotte softball vs Memphis
April 10, 6 p.m.
Sue M. Daughtridge Stadium

From the UNC Charlotte police logs (3/15 - 3/27)

Deonna Dickens | Staff Writer

The following are some incidents in the UNC Charlotte campus police logs from March 15 to 27, 2026.

March 21 Suspicious Person

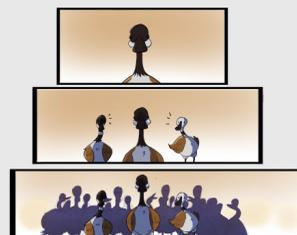
An officer was flagged down at the Popp-Martin Student Union regarding a suspicious person in Social 704. Officers found the unaffiliated subject in the loading dock stairwell. A records check revealed the subject had an outstanding warrant and an active trespass order. Officers located a knife and marijuana on his person.

March 26 Traffic Stop

An officer conducted a traffic stop in Lot 13 and observed a firearm in the vehicle. The driver, who is not affiliated with the University, was detained. Further investigation revealed marijuana in the vehicle, as well. The driver was arrested and charged with possession of a firearm and possession of marijuana.

Niner's Comics: Flabbergasting flock

TJ Carter | Staff Illustrator



Charlotte riders still question safety despite CATS crackdown and heightened security efforts

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor

Months after the fatal stabbing of Iryna Zarutka in August of 2025, which shook riders across Charlotte's transit system, questions about safety on the city's light rail persist despite expanded patrols and new security strategies.

The death of Zarutka gained national and local attention, with several politicians, including President Donald Trump, criticizing the security protocols of the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS).

Following the incident, CATS and Charlotte leaders said security would be increased to ensure riders feel safe using the light rail.

However, in December of 2025, there was another incident on the Lynx Blue Line, which officials say stemmed from a verbal dispute that escalated into violence. The incident involved a stabbing of a light rail rider in the chest.

With two violent incidents that gained a lot of media attention just months apart, transit leaders shared that they were "taking action."

Since the December stabbing, CATS has rolled out a series of safety measures, including increased police presence, policy changes and new reporting tools.

However, rider experiences suggest a more complicated reality, and for some, the difference is noticeable.

Rider reactions to increased security

Kaylie Espinosa, a frequent rider who uses the UNC Charlotte main station stop to get to work about four times a week, said that she's noticed a heavy increase in law enforcement during her commute.

"I never saw sheriffs on the light rail before," Espinosa said. "But I see them

now, like, frequently asking if people have tickets. There was even one time I was on the light rail, and they were like, 'Are you a student here?' making sure everybody was a student at the stop."

While Espinosa said the increased visibility offers some Charlotteans reassurance, she remains uncertain about the broader effectiveness of it all.

"Things that happen just kind of come out of nowhere," she said. "I feel like making sure everybody has a ticket, it's probably not the best way to prevent things."

Others say that the heightened security presence faded quickly after the first few weeks following the August incident.

Aaron Lirag, a second-year student who rides the train less frequently, recalled seeing more personnel shortly after the stabbing that killed Zarutka but says that has since changed.

"During the first few weeks ... I noticed more presence," Lirag said. "But now I haven't really seen that. They've kind of just disappeared."

He added that his recent experiences resemble those from before the incident, with little to no fare enforcement or visible monitoring, specifically, with tickets to check whether riders have passes.

"They kind of just let you go on the train without checking," he said.

The inconsistency in riders' perceptions of security on the light rail highlights the ongoing challenges and critiques that CATS officials have faced.

CATS provides answers and planned solutions

According to CATS, the answer lies not in placing officers on every light rail, but in a

broader data-driven deployment strategy.

In the CATS December safety update, the agency emphasized that no major transit system in the country staffs personnel on every vehicle at all times.

Instead, CATS has partnered with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) to significantly boost patrol hours, exceeding 1,000 hours per week in November of 2025, and introduced mobile security units, including bike and urban terrain vehicle patrols.

The CATS agency also created a specialized operations unit to focus on high-traffic areas and "hot spots," while reorganizing its security structure into divisions aligned with policing models.

Despite the heightened efforts, many riders are still too hesitant to go back on the light rail altogether.

"The stabbing that happened last year was the reason I purchased a handgun and applied for my concealed carry permit," said an anonymous third-year student. "I would like to see tickets being checked more, potentially increased security measures at every stop, and maybe having a guard on board at all times."

CATS officials say they have received several suggestions on how to improve security. Some suggestions, such as having a guard on board at all times, are not entirely practical, as staffing every train would require over 10,000 hours of additional labor per week.

Currently, CATS and CMPD do not have the resources to supply the high-hour and labor demand according to the December safety update.

Due to resource constraints, CATS shared in its December safety update that there are plans for a dedicated officer group focused solely on Charlotte transportation.

CATS has also recently released its "Text-a-Tip" number, which riders can use if they see something on the light rail that makes it unsafe.

The feature was announced on Feb. 24, 2026, and is a simple tool to navigate, as all riders need to do is message the number 704-251-6402 to report an incident.

"Safety is — and will continue to be — our top priority," said Brent Cagle, interim CATS chief executive officer, in the announcement. "By expanding the ways riders can quickly reach us and by clearly promoting these tools across our buses, trains and stations, we are making it even easier for customers to speak up and partner with us in keeping the system safe."

CATS has also leaned heavily on public participation, urging riders to report suspicious behavior through its app, the new text tip line, emergency call buttons or by calling 911.

"Transit is a microcosm of our community," the agency said in its safety update statement. "What we're seeing here extends beyond transit itself."

For many riders, that broader context doesn't erase the day-to-day uncertainty of stepping onto a train.

Some, like Espinosa, continue to ride regularly, balancing convenience with caution. Others, like Lirag, remain skeptical that meaningful change has taken hold. And a portion of the community has opted out entirely, choosing alternative transportation after last year's violence.

The numbers behind violent incidents in Charlotte

While transit violence is not exclusive to Charlotte, there has been a reported decrease in violent incidents in Charlotte as a whole.

In the CMPD's end-of-year crime report that was published on Jan. 15, there was an overall crime decrease of 9% in 2025 and 21% decrease in violent crimes.

Included in this report was a 5% increase in total police interactions and cases.

"Day in and day out, our officers defuse conflicts, address crimes as they unfold, prevent escalations of violence and provide our investigators with the critical information needed to identify and charge offenders," Chief Estella Patterson wrote in the report. "Our officers do more than respond to crime. They take proactive steps every day to prevent it and keep our neighborhoods safe."

Despite these decreases, a total of 33 incidents were reported on or near the light rail from August 2025 to December 2025.

There was also an audit by the Federal Transit Administration in September 2025, with the findings released in February 2026, identifying 18 areas where CATS failed to meet safety standards.



Foreclosure of off-campus student housing The Union and The Mill raises concerns over communication, conditions

Cassandra Schilling | Staff Writer

On March 23, tenants of University City student living complexes, The Union and The Mill, received a letter from an anonymous tenant warning fellow students that the apartment complexes were in foreclosure “as of last week.”

Additionally, the letter stated that the online portal that tenants used to pay rent was shut down.

The foreclosure was confirmed by a public notice sourced by The Mecklenburg Times. This notice was published on Feb. 17, 2026, yet students who live at the complex were only made aware on March 23.

The Union and The Mill sit just half a mile away from campus.

According to the notice, the Limited Liability Companies (LLCs) that owned the properties failed to make the required payments on a loan they borrowed in August of 2022.

As a result, the lender of the loan ordered a foreclosure, seizing the complexes to force a sale and recover its money. The trustee appointed to sell the property via auction was granted permission to foreclose on Nov. 13, 2025. The property’s auction was scheduled for March 3, 2026.

The LLCs that defaulted on the loan are listed as Kesser Oakleigh MU LLC, Kesser Rahs MU LLC and MILL CGC LLC. The Union and The Mill were owned by property management company Covenant Property Services (CPS).

CPS is not accredited by the Better Business Bureau (BBB). Still, the company has had seven complaints filed with the BBB by tenants in the last three years. Only one of them has been resolved.

According to a statement by Isaiah Grayson, UNC Charlotte’s student body president, The Mill and The



Union now have a new property management company called PeakMade.

“Students at the Union and the Mill can text PeakMade at 704-750-8668,” the statement read. Grayson also wrote that “signage” will be on the office door in the upcoming days, but a new online portal may not be up and available to tenants until mid-April. Residents will also not be penalized for rent not paid by April 1.

The night of Grayson’s announcement, tenants received letters under their doors from PeakMade, also informing them of the change.

Property manager Eugene Pettis and five other staff members will remain employed at the complexes. The letter also informed students that they will experience no changes to their leases or payment schedules. As stated, tenants learned of the foreclosure through an anonymous letter from another resident.

Tenant concerns

According to Drew Gledhill, third-year student and resident of The Mill, the lack of communication from leadership is nothing new.

“I’m convinced there’s an email list they forgot to put me on or something,” Gledhill said.

The third-year student also shared that when he submitted maintenance requests, the maintenance workers would show up “whenever they feel like, with no warning.”

The upkeep of The Mill has also been affected by the foreclosure and subsequent firings, with Gledhill sharing that trash has since been “piling up” near the dumpster. Yet even prior to the foreclosure, Gledhill shared that he observed outlets not working in his apartment and “clear signs” that units were not cleaned between residents.

“[There was a] clogged shower drain, nasty oven, dusty vents, [the] floors felt sort of waxy. [I] basically had to do the cleaning myself over time instead of starting over with a fresh canvas,” Gledhill said.

Gledhill is not the first to discuss the building’s conditions.

In February 2025, students living at both The Union and The Mill, alongside an anonymous staff member, told WCCB Charlotte that the complexes had black mold, no air conditioning in the summer and a lack of hot water.

The anonymous employee added that she was concerned for her safety, telling the news outlet that she was attacked by a “squatter.”

Legal advice for students

Tenants are legally safeguarded by the Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure Act of 2009 (PTFA).

According to the PTFA, tenants who entered into bona fide lease agreements before the notice of foreclosure must be allowed to remain in the property until their leases expire.

To get assistance on the legalities, several students have contacted UNC Charlotte’s Student Legal Services (SLS).

“We are fielding student questions and sending updates as they are available,” Ashley McAlarney, director of SLS, said.

McAlarney added that, according to SLS’s understanding, a transition team from PeakMade will be on site during the next few weeks to resume operations.

“In the legal sense, students’ current leases remain in place,” McAlarney said. “We recommend that students be on the lookout for communication from the new management regarding items like rent payments and maintenance requests. Students are also welcome to contact SLS with additional questions or concerns.”



Wes Packham/Niner Times

Charlotteans hope to make an impact at No Kings protest

Kyle Boucher | Staff Writer

After nearly a year of protesting against President Donald Trump and his administration, hundreds of people marched through uptown Charlotte, despite seeing little change in the current political situation.

Charlotte has seen three No Kings protests since June 2025, when they first began, with the most recent taking place on March 28, in First Ward Park.

The previous No Kings protests also took place in First Ward Park, on June 14 and Oct. 18, 2025.

The protests aimed to voice concerns about the Trump administration and drew several hundred people. They have been hosted by Indivisible Charlotte, a non-profit organization that helps organize protests across the greater Charlotte area.

However, some people at the protest felt that the political environment in Washington, D.C. had not changed much since the first No Kings protest.

Despite this sentiment, the protestors chanted their demands, determined to hold on to their ideals.

The March protest

The latest No Kings protest followed a similar formula to the previous two, with introductions from Carolyn Eberly, the director of Indivisible Charlotte, and Cameron Pruette, executive director of the Freedom Center for Social Justice.

The two groups have organized several protests throughout 2025-2026 in Charlotte outside of No Kings.

Then, historian and author Ibram Kendi delivered a speech sharing his opposition to the great replacement theory, a social concept which suggests that welcoming immigrants into a Western country will replace the existing white culture.

This theory has been disproven, but is still used by many far-right supporters when talking about the Trump administration's immigration crackdown.

After Kendi's speech, the protestors lined up and began the march through uptown Charlotte.

Have the protests had any impact?

Many protestors have voiced concerns with a variety of political topics

like ICE, immigration policies and legislation passed by the Trump administration.

However, several people believed that the protests had not shown any notable effects on the current administration. The No Kings movement has been largely ignored by politicians, and yet Charlotte residents still gather together to protest.

"I don't think the administration cares, and that's not why I'm doing it. I'm doing it to get more people to come out and say, yeah, that's not right," Ken Hungate, one of the protestors, said.

Many people

said the greatest effect of the No Kings protests has been the development of a community with shared beliefs across the Charlotte area.

A sense of community in Charlotte

No Kings protestors from various minority groups, such as the Hispanic/Latin and LGBTQ+ communities, have voiced feelings of mistreatment from the government.

The Charlotte protestors have agreed to form a unified community in which all people join together in shared distrust of the Trump administration.

"We've made communities that give us a rea-

son to come together and support each other," Andi Laniewicz, another protestor said.

Protesters in Charlotte said they have found comfort in knowing that others feel distressed by the current political situation.

"I like the community, it's nice not to feel alone and see other people not feeling alone," Zach Smith, a protestor said.

There is a sense of belonging within the protesting community that often helps people cope with negative feelings about politics.

"I need to raise my voice. I feel hopeless," Scott Greenberg, another protestor said. "Because of everything that's been going on with this administration, it's easy to feel helpless, and raising my voice is an easy thing to do, and there's no reason I shouldn't raise my voice."

While the protests haven't had many major political effects, they have had local effects, creating a sense of unity among protestors throughout Charlotte.

Future change over immediate relief

After nearly a year of protesting with little change to the political situation, many people continue to protest for a variety of reasons, from trying to create change to simply keeping hope.

Several protestors stated that they march because the alternative is to ignore their problems entirely.

Even if some people believe the situation is grim, many still attend the No Kings protests to foster hope for themselves and those around them.

Another major reason people continue to attend the protests is to raise awareness of these political issues and inspire younger generations to vote.

With the next presidential elections scheduled for 2028, protestors hope it will change the current political climate.

Instead of seeking out immediate change, people have chosen to focus on preparing for future progress. Their hope is that a new president can make legal changes to solve many of the protestors' political issues.

"Everybody needs to vote this time," Marjirie Storch, a protestor said. "If we get enough people on the streets, that's a good sign that we're going to make a difference at the voting booth."



Ahmed Ahmed/Niner Times



 New chat?

 Search chats

 Saved images



Commentary: The rotating wardrobe of AI clothing removal

Kayla Altman | Staff Writer

Grok AI is sounding the alarm about a new dilemma: non-consensual AI undressing. Users on X have been able to commission the AI chatbot to undress people or pose them in suggestive ways, all without the consent of the people displayed in these images.

This new technology is disproportionately used on women, and as Women's History Month draws to a close, it reminds us why we celebrate in the first place.

Women have fought a distinct battle: one of control and self-governance. We see this reflected in our history, and most importantly, in this issue: our clothes.

Women's clothing history

In the 1850s, American feminists pushed back on the common dress of the day, addressing the long sweeping skirts, tightly-bound corsets, suffocating garters and flimsy shoes in fashion at the time. Suffragettes speculated that this dress was used to intentionally make women subservient by hampering their physical capabilities. This realization led to the American dress reform of the 1850s, and is among many other movements challenging social control over women's bodies through clothing.

Other countries experienced similar dress reforms. Women who were part of

the Russian Intelligentsia, a late 19th to early 20th century group of educated intellectuals, traded in their dresses for simple garments to communicate that they wanted to be recognized for their intellectual identity instead of their appearance.

Women in India reformed traditional clothing, like saris, to better accommodate modern mobility without losing traditional attire and national identity to British colonial occupation.

In China, women shifted from traditional hanfu styles of clothing to more modernized dress, like the qipao, to promote mobility and public participation, signifying women moving from a passive role in society to an active one.

Women's clothing now

Fast-forward to the 21st century, and women today largely have autonomy over their physical clothes. Are there parts of the world that still require dress reform? Absolutely, but what each of these examples shows is that women have made significant progress towards governance over their own clothes.

Enter, non-consensual AI "nudification." In the absence of control over women's physical clothes, a subset of users online has taken it upon themselves to control women's clothes digitally.

How does it work? Typically, it's a straightforward process: users select an image of a person they would like to nudify, and then prompt the application or program to do so. It's that simple. The process varies from site to site, as well as the results, but the technology needed to create these AI deepfakes is not alien, unreachable rocket science: It's technology we all have in our back pocket.

Oddly enough, clothing removal is not the only thing users are implementing to digitally augment women's clothes. Users have also been able to utilize specific AI programs to add clothing back onto women who choose to dress revealingly in an effort to make the women more modest. This feature has captivated right-wing men's rights groups, typ-

ically interested in returns to "traditional" displays of femininity seen in the "tradwife" movement.

I looked for the other side's voice in this dilemma: people who overtly support the creation of non-consensual AI deepfakes. However, I couldn't find it. Public defense for this kind of violation doesn't exist because people understand the social contract of privacy. So the open discussions in support of this contact remain deep in private subreddits and 4chan threads.

The harm posed

Non-consensual AI undressing promotes the objectification, usage and desire for control over women's bodies by manipulating their clothes without regard for the will of the woman.

The fight for what women can wear was never about the clothing itself. Preceding feminists never took to the streets in protest because they felt so deeply that their legs were destined to be fitted in a pair of pants, or because they thought innately they belonged in a T-shirt. Women fought for the principle that no one else should have jurisdiction over what anyone else wears.

These AI deepfakes have disproportionately affected women, and we see it in studies time and time again. A study by the American Sunlight Project tracking digital nudification of members of Congress found that out of over 35,000 mentions, 26 different congresswomen were traced, while only one congressman was.

A study by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) found that in the 11 days Grok's image-editing AI was free, 65% of the roughly four million images created during that time were sexualized images of men, women and children, with a later conservative estimate by The New York Times finding that 41% of the images were sexualized images of women.

With the introduction of this technology, it seems a paradox has formed; one where women can't win. If they choose to show

their skin, it can be digitally covered, or they can choose to cover themselves just for it to be digitally removed. Either way, wanting to control what women wear seems to permeate every piece of women's clothing.

Protection and advocacy

Actions are being taken to protect victims of AI deepfakes. The DEFIANCE Act of 2025, a bill passed unanimously by the Senate that lets victims of AI forgeries sue for damages, addresses the harm these deepfakes cause and allows victims to regain control over their likeness. The bill describes the destabilizing effects deepfakes have on victims, including the social rupture, anxiety and depression these victims may experience.

The TAKE IT DOWN Act, signed into law as of May 19, 2025, criminalizes the publi-

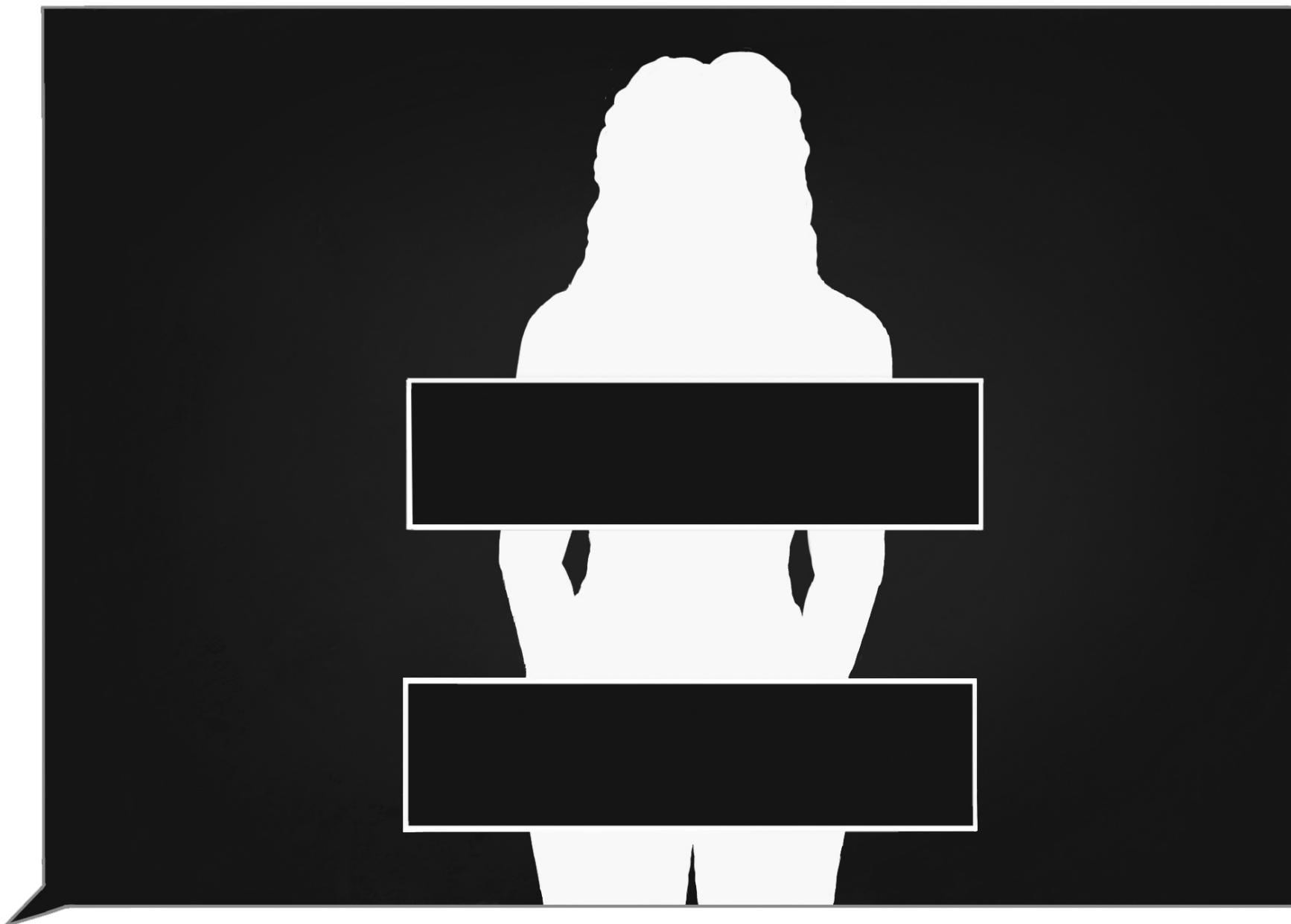
cation of non-consensual intimate imagery, including AI deepfakes. The bill also requires that websites and applications implement a "notice-and-removal" system for said images at the depicted person's request by May 19, 2026.

We're fixing the aftermath that comes as a result of intimate AI deepfakes, but the next step we take has to be preventative action. The initiative victims can currently take against AI deepfakes only cures the symptoms; the leftovers after the deepfake is already made.

Our technology has to evolve past that to prevent non-consensual AI deepfakes from being created in the first place. That should be the next step, and the next thing people advocate for.

Ali Thiam/Niner Times

Remove her clothes.





UNC Charlotte's 'Nouveau Now' reinvigorates the love of historical performing arts

Cris Velazquez-Euceda | Staff Writer

The collaborative works of the UNC Charlotte performing arts scene were showcased in uptown Charlotte's Carolina Theatre on March 28 and 29.

The event, totaling five performances, was a collaborative effort by the faculty and staff of the dance department that took student performers to the stage. The event also invited members of the music department to collaborate on the five pieces.

Performances of the night

The event was held in honor of Martha Graham, who founded the Martha Graham Dance Company in 1926. Kim Jones, Associate Professor of Dance at UNC Charlotte, choreographed

the honorary piece, "Adorations Reimagined," a revised version of Graham's original vision with a contemporary take.

The dance company is considered the nation's oldest. The piece was performed in partnership with GRAHAM100, which celebrates the 100-year anniversary of Graham's legacy.

The event also saw collaboration with UNC Charlotte's jazz ensemble on two performances. Alongside the jazz ensemble, performers were able to dance with live music under "Duke's Hymn," a work choreographed by Associate Professor of Dance Tamera Williams. The dance was done behind musician Duke Ellington's "Praise God and Dance," a 10-minute performance that highlights Ellington's fusion of genres.

Associate Professor of Contemporary Voice Sequina Dubose was the soloist tasked with performing alongside the jazz ensemble. Dubose talks of her connection to the song through previous performances and her initial reaction to the invitation.

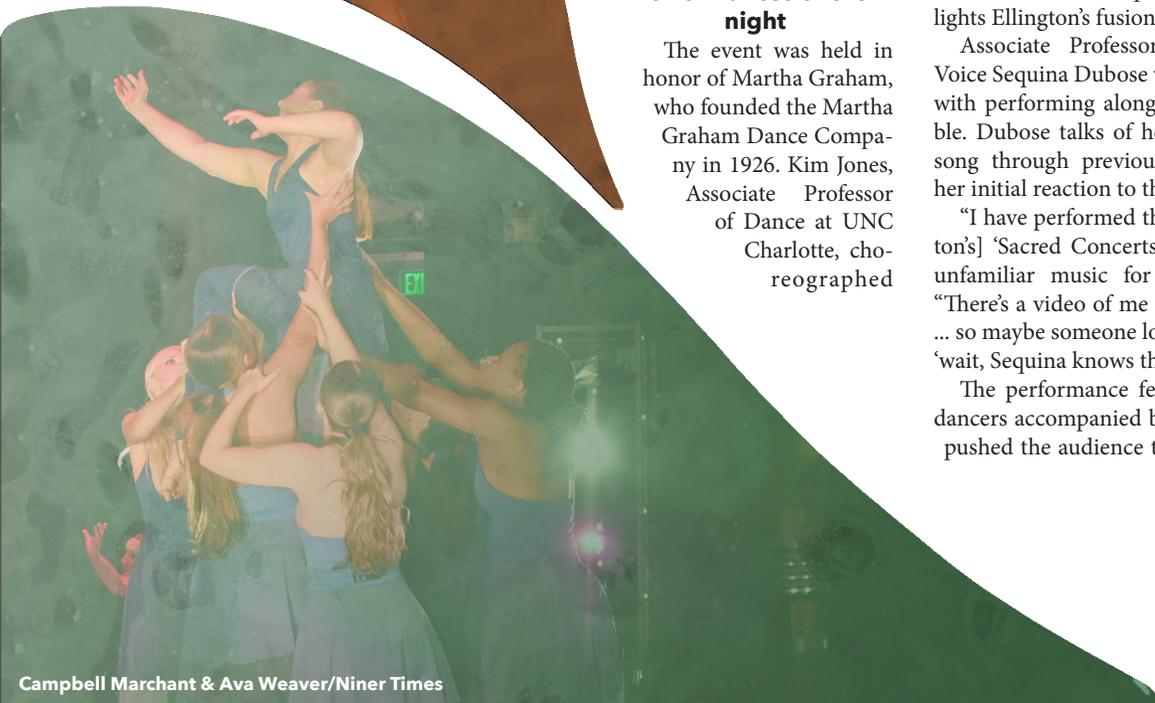
"I have performed the entirety [of Ellington's] 'Sacred Concerts' before, so it wasn't unfamiliar music for me," Dubose said. "There's a video of me performing the song ... so maybe someone looked it up and said 'wait, Sequina knows this.'"

The performance featured just a few dancers accompanied by live music that pushed the audience to engage with

dance in new ways. Fourth-year student Reagan Overby was one of three dancers for the opening show. For Overby, the performance was a chance to experience jazz on the stage.

"I've always trained in jazz, but all the pieces I performed in shows have been modern or contemporary," Overby said. "I was really looking forward to doing a different style than what I'm used to."

Two more pieces, "Ode to the Art Work of Alphonse Mucha" and "Monachopsis," were choreographed by Associate Professor Delia



Campbell Marchant & Ava Weaver/Niner Times



Neil and Assistant Professor Ashley Tate, respectively. The former featured a live performance from the UNC Charlotte Chamber Players.

Preparation for the show

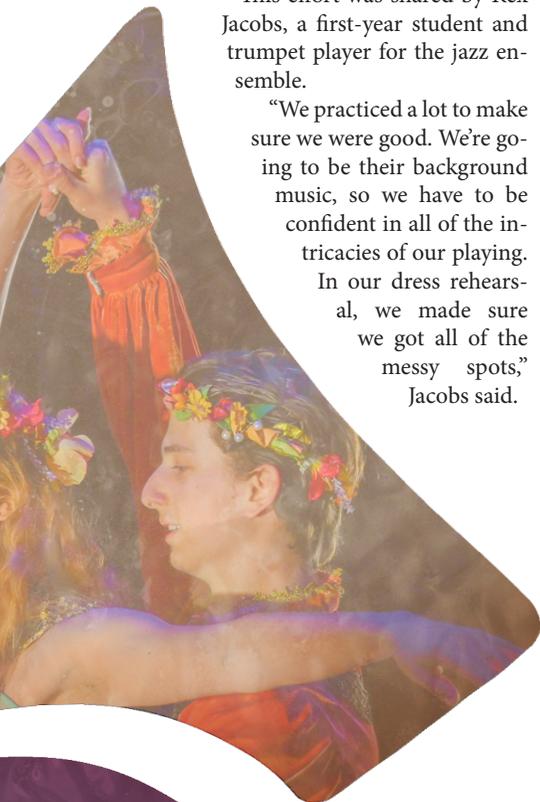
The planning and practice for Nouveau Now was a process that took the utmost effort from faculty and students alike. Overby described the type of training her group had to undergo for their performance, detailing the training for moments that the audience may not recognize.

"It was a lot of cross-training since, cardio-wise, it's a very high-intensity piece, even when we're off stage. We're running to different wings, trying to get to our new spots and getting prepared for the next section," Overby said.

This effort was shared by Rex Jacobs, a first-year student and trumpet player for the jazz ensemble.

"We practiced a lot to make sure we were good. We're going to be their background music, so we have to be confident in all of the intricacies of our playing.

In our dress rehearsal, we made sure we got all of the messy spots," Jacobs said.



the performers, members of the event shared excitement when discussing their collaborations. Dubose described her current and previous collaborations with Williams as enjoyable every time.

"It's been like a return to collaboration with her, so that's always fun," Dubose said. "We have fun when we make music and art together. It's kind of like being paid to play and calling it work."

Overby also discussed her excitement about working with Williams again as a performer.

"The last time I'd worked with her was my first semester at school, and she's just a really wonderful professor to work with," Overby said.

Jacobs shared his overall experience with the dance department, describing this as a first for him.

"Being new to [UNC Charlotte], it's something that I haven't done before, so it was great that the different areas of performing arts were able to collaborate. It was a great experience playing, and good for the dancers to have live music," Jacobs said.

Although the process was extensive and rigorous, the event that was put together paid off in audience reaction. The experience was met with praise and applause, while performers were met with admiration, pictures and bouquets at the end of the night.

“

"Being new to [UNC Charlotte], it's something I haven't done before, so it was great that the different areas of performing arts were able to collaborate. It was a great experience playing."

- Rex Jacobs, first-year

Macy Turner, a third-year student and performer, discussed her personal experience with balancing practice and classes.

"Rehearsals start pretty soon after that [auditions], and rehearsals are every week leading up to the show," Turner said. "It's just time management and getting everything in order, making sure you stay on top of assignments and mapping everything out."

A work of collaboration

Despite the rigorous training for many of

"['Adorations Reimagined'] stuck out to me. It just seemed like everybody was aligned, in the same movement and everybody was trying to paint the same picture," attendee Jaden Mars said.

"I'm not too familiar with dance," fourth-year student Duncan Harper said. "But as someone who was in performing arts, I can understand how much work people put into this."





Column: Charlotte men's basketball hired the right man in Wes Miller

Shane Reese | Staff Writer

When a sports program announces a coaching change, everyone is eager to find out who the new head coach will be. Once the hiring is made official, the focus shifts to the next pressing question: Can this coach lead the team to success?

More importantly, how long will it take to see that success? Based on his coaching history, Charlotte found a head coach who can provide the answers fans want to hear in Wes Miller.

Born and raised in Greensboro, North Carolina, Miller is all too familiar with Tar Heel state basketball, and his résumé proves he is equipped to lead the 49ers to success.

A history of winning

Miller has coached college basketball for 15 years, with 10 of them spent at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). During his time with the Spartans, Miller became the program's all-time winningest coach.

He recorded 185 wins, two NCAA Tournament appearances, two NIT appearances, four Southern Conference titles and a program-record 28 wins during the 2018-19 season.

During his final five seasons at UNCG, Miller led the Spartans to 125 wins, including 70 against conference opponents. The Spartans secured consecutive 20-win seasons and two NCAA Tournament appearances during that stretch.

He also led the Spartans to two Southern Conference Tournament championships.

After spending 10 years at UNCG, Miller became the head coach at the University of Cincinnati.

Miller did not record a losing season with Cincinnati, leading the Bearcats to five consecutive winning seasons. Though the Big 12 Conference is one of the toughest in college basketball, Miller's teams earned wins over multiple ranked opponents.

Cincinnati recorded wins against the University of Kansas, Texas Tech University and Brigham Young University. The Bearcats' 84-68 victory against No. 8 Kansas this season handed the Jayhawks their largest home loss to an unranked opponent in program history.

While Miller has proven himself as an experienced coach with a strong track record, building a successful program goes beyond in-game results. Player development and recruiting are equally critical.

Developing players properly matters, and Miller understands how to do that at Charlotte.

Miller's recruiting track record

Several all-conference players developed under Miller at Cincinnati. He recruited sophomore center Moustapha Thiam, a 7-foot-2 presence who had been nominated for the Kyle Macy Award, given to the top NCAA Division I freshman.

Miller also secured one of the highest-rated recruiting classes ahead of the 2025-26 season. The class includes former four-star and McDonald's All-American freshman forward Shon Abaev and former four-star freshman guard Keyshuan Tillery.

In addition to incoming freshmen, Miller recruited all-conference junior guard Edgerrin 'Jizzle' James Jr. in 2023. James earned Big 12 honorable mention honors for the 2025-26 season, the same year he led the Bearcats in scoring and assists.

Miller's familiarity with North Carolina basketball provides a clear advantage in recruiting prospects across the state.

NBA players from Greensboro include Oklahoma City Thunder guard Aaron Wiggins and Miami Heat center Bam Adebayo. With ties to programs that produce high-level talent, Miller has access to strong recruiting pipelines both in and out of Charlotte.

When fans refer to North Carolina as a basketball state, they also point to the high school talent that fuels college programs. Miller can use that pipeline to elevate Charlotte basketball.

Competing at a higher level

Before Miller became head coach of the Bearcats, Cincinnati competed in the American Conference, the same conference Charlotte currently calls home.

While the American Conference is competitive, it is not viewed as a top-tier conference by most college basketball analysts. Strength of schedule plays a major role in NCAA Tournament selection, which can put teams from the American at a disadvantage.

Charlotte's long-term goal of elevating its program profile aligns with competing at a higher level. This season, eight teams from the Big 12 earned NCAA Tournament bids, compared to just one from the American Conference.

That lone bid went to the University of South Florida, a program that has seen improvement under new leadership.

Miller has rebuilt programs before, both at UNCG and Cincinnati, and he has the experience to do the same at Charlotte.



Reflection Sound Studios: How Charlotte eats itself

Nicholas Hunt | Staff Writer

Megan Khor/Niner Times & courtesy of Reflections Sound Studios

If you drive through Plaza Midwood in uptown Charlotte today, you'll notice a few things: a nice-looking couple wearing matching Lululemon attire walking a designer multi-mix purebred hypoallergenic poodle, numerous high-rise apartment buildings, coffee shops and various construction projects littered throughout the streets.

The clichés of the area have become so ubiquitous that joking about Plaza Midwood is beating a dead horse. However, this wasn't always the case; Plaza Midwood was once a creative hub in Charlotte and home to the city's most important musical landmark: Reflection Sound Studios.

For example, the X-Teens were not a household name until 1984. Formed in Durham, they were a North Carolina new-wave/power-pop group from the early to mid-80s. They released three records, toured a bit, then disbanded. When I found their third album, "Love and Politics," at a local record store and took a look at the liner notes, I found an interesting surprise: 'RECORDED AT REFLECTIONS, CHARLOTTE.'

Being both a music nerd and a Charlottean, I was immediately intrigued; what exactly was "Reflections", who else recorded there and did the studio still exist?

Charlotte's recording hub

Reflection Sound Studio was founded in 1969 by Wayne Jernigan, who at the time was a musician based out of Nashville, Tennessee. Reflections was originally located on South Boulevard, but eventually moved to Plaza Midwood, where the studio resided for the remainder of its existence.

During the studios' heyday, Reflection was Charlotte's go-to recording studio, with hundreds of local and nationally recognized artists recording there. Some of the studio's most notable inhabitants included James Brown, Whitney Houston, Kenny Loggins and Hootie & The Blowfish.

Reflection played an integral role in changing the direction of pop music in the late 20th century. In the early 1980s, R.E.M. would record their first two albums, "Murmur" and "Reckoning," at Reflection. Both albums

were released to critical acclaim and helped pioneer the burgeoning genre of college rock, later called alternative rock. The band would continue their career and eventually go on to become one of the most successful and best-selling bands of all time.

A changing city

By the 2000s, Reflection's luck began to fade. The music industry was changing: The introduction of music downloading and streaming killed physical music media, and resources available on the internet democratized the process of recording music. Like hundreds of other recording studios throughout the country, Reflection was mortally wounded by the change and never fully recovered.

The story of Reflection Sound Studio ends the way most businesses do in Charlotte. In 2014, Jernigan would give in to the pressure of declining business and eager real estate developers and close Reflection Sound Studio.

Equipment was auctioned off, signage removed and tapes left behind were returned to

their artists. It was all over. The building was demolished, swallowed up back into the belly of the city that birthed it. In return, Charlotte belched out an apartment complex on top of its former recording mecca, an effort to accommodate the city's seemingly gluttonous growth.

Reflection Sound Studio is gone, and it's never coming back. It's easy to resent and be angered by what happened to Reflection, but I believe it's better to enjoy and cherish what was produced by its existence. When I listen to "Murmur" or "Reckoning", I don't get upset; I hear the beautiful sounds of guitar, drums, bass and piano all recorded proudly in our own Queen City. I think that's pretty great.



Four-year 49er Spencer Nolan leads by example on and off field

Sean McGuffin | Staff Writer

In today's era of college sports, it's rare to see great players stay in one place. Changes in NIL and the transfer portal have led to frequent roster turnover year in and year out for college programs. But every once in a blue moon, a student-athlete will stay loyal to the university they started with.

Amidst constant roster reshuffling and player movement, Charlotte's senior baseball star Spencer Nolan has remained a 49er through his collegiate career and contributed experience, leadership and production for all four years.

Nolan has made an impact since his first game at Hayes Stadium. Coming from a high school base-

ball hotbed in Wilmington, North Carolina, Nolan earned a spot on Charlotte's starting rotation his freshman year as a power-hitting utility player who can cover first base as well as the outfield. One hundred and fifty-three games and 82 hits later, Nolan entered his senior year with expectations of leadership and offensive production.

In the spring 2026 season, Charlotte's non-conference slate has led to some unpredictable outcomes. The 49ers have seen impressive upset wins against ranked competition, while also dropping games they were favored to win — most notably dropping a

series 2-1 against Saint John's University and losing 10-11 to the University of South Carolina Upstate.

Nolan acknowledges the ups and downs of the season so far, but sees real potential in this year's team.

"We have a really high ceiling," Nolan said. "We've shown whenever we play to our full potential, like the way we look right now, and I think we have a lot more to show the rest of the way."

The best the 49ers have looked all season was a 14-0 win over the University of Virginia on March 3.

"I felt like everything was clicking that game," Nolan said. "That's a perfect example of what we can do when we play with high energy and play together."

Nolan is crucial for the 49ers' team chemistry, not only on the diamond but in the clubhouse as well. This season, Nolan has taken on a role as a locker-room leader for the team's underclassmen. A member of the American Athletic Conference Academic All-Conference team in 2025, Nolan makes for a strong example of balancing academic excellence with athletic success.

"I like to lead the younger guys," Nolan said. "And just from a mental standpoint — tell guys they're good enough and give all the guys confidence we need to play to the best of our ability."

Having played at Charlotte for all four years of his collegiate career, Nolan's loyalty has made him a fan favorite among both the 49er student body and alumni.

"I can't imagine being anywhere else besides here. I've had so much fun. I've grown so much as a person," Nolan said. "So I don't think there's any reason to leave when we have everything here that we need."

His loyalty to Charlotte has also helped develop a relationship with head coach Robert Woodard. Nolan has played all four years under Woodard and has developed a special bond with the manager over his career with the 49ers. A starter from his first game at Charlotte, Nolan remained in the lineup for more than 120 games. Woodard has always shown belief in Nolan.

"I've been in plenty of times where I've been struggling, and he's been in my corner, and he's trusted in me, and I owe it to him to play as hard as I can, and I'm just super blessed that he's given me the opportunities that he has," Nolan said.

Under Woodard, the 49ers have been a favorite to win the American Conference year after year, and 2026 is no exception. As the preseason favorites to win the conference, pressure is high for a Charlotte postseason run and at Robert and Mariam Hayes Stadium, where Nolan and the 49ers play, the pressure is making diamonds.

"We love the expectations. We love any eyes that are on us. We know there's a target on our back, not just here on campus, but from other teams around the country," Nolan said.

The expectations are bringing big crowds to the Hayes, including 1,012 for the win against Virginia, crowds that Nolan loves to see.

"Whenever people come out and support us, it just shows that we're doing something right, and we know we're good enough to exceed those expectations as well," Nolan said.

Fan interest should continue with big in-state matchups against East Carolina University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill still to come.

With roughly 30 games ahead of him and 153 behind him, Nolan has plenty to reflect on. Looking back, he said that if he could give advice to his freshman self, he would keep it simple: "Have fun. Enjoy it. You know, results don't matter as much as you think they do. You'll regret not having as much fun as you possibly can."

In an era of college sports defined by movement, Nolan has stayed a 49er — and made the most of it. Across four years at Charlotte, he's paired production with leadership and an authentic love for the game and will leave his mark as both a steady presence and a standard for what it means to be a 49er.



Niner Times File

Charlotte football adds 21 transfers as roster takes shape for 2026

Tre Holland | Staff writer

Rolando Vera Hi-Fong/Niner Times

As Charlotte athletics enter a new era under Director of Athletics Kevin White, Charlotte football introduced new talent through the transfer portal. The 49ers held their first spring practices on March 24 and 26, and head coach Tim Albin's squad has added 21 new transfers as it finalizes the 2026 roster.

The additions include 15 offensive players, five defensive players and one special teamer. While some transfers may not make the final roster by summer, a breakdown of the latest additions is provided below.

Gonzales gives quarterback room a lift

Redshirt senior quarterback Cole Gonzales comes from the University of Pittsburgh, where he saw limited action, completing 11 of 22 total passes. Before Pittsburgh, Gonzales spent three seasons at Western Carolina University, where he recorded the No. 3 most passing yards (6,682) and the No. 2 most passing touchdowns (51) in program history.

A season-ending injury in 2024 sidelined Gonzales, leading to his transfer to Pittsburgh. Gonzales was active during the first spring practices and is expected to compete for the starting quarterback job, bringing valuable experience to the 49ers quarterback room.

Offensive line reinforcements

The offensive line additions are headlined by redshirt junior interior lineman J'Ven Williams, a former five-star prospect ac-

ording to 247Sports. Williams is a 6-foot-5, 319-pound transfer from Penn State University and is expected to be a key contributor after a significant NIL investment.

The first transfer to commit to Charlotte was redshirt senior Nicolas Cruji. The 6-foot-4, 305-pound interior lineman comes from the University of Maine and was rated a three-star transfer prospect by On3.

Other additions include senior tackle Mathias Nielsen from Virginia Union University and redshirt senior interior lineman Luke Sandy from the University of Wyoming, who project as depth pieces.

Backfield bolstered

Charlotte added three running backs from the transfer portal: redshirt sophomore Khamani Alexander from Appalachian State University, redshirt junior D'Mariun Perteet from Coastal Carolina University and redshirt senior Chance Williams from the University of Cincinnati.

Alexander rushed for 50 yards last season, including 14 yards on four carries against Charlotte.

Perteet is a former junior college athlete who rushed for 1,854 yards in two seasons at Northwest Mississippi Community College before transferring to Coastal Carolina in 2025.

Williams, a 5-foot-7 back, enters his senior season after time at Cincinnati and Grambling State University. He has totaled more than 1,200 rushing yards and 200 receiving yards in his collegiate career.

New weapons for passing game

The 49ers add four receivers: redshirt senior Cam Pedro from Southeast Missouri State University, redshirt sophomore Zyhheem Collick from Bryant University, redshirt sophomore Tank Boston from North Carolina State University and senior Jaden Barnes from Appalachian State. Charlotte also adds two tight ends: redshirt senior Logan Mauldin from McNeese State University and junior Lane Wadle from Georgia State University.

Pedro spent 2022 and 2023 at Marshall University, where he recorded no statistics and redshirted as a freshman, before totaling more than 800 receiving yards over the past two seasons.

Collick redshirted in 2024 and started all 12 games in 2025, posting a career-high 35 receptions for 670 yards.

Boston, a former four-star recruit, redshirted in 2024 and recorded two receptions for 11 yards in 2025 before transferring.

Barnes spent two seasons at Austin Peay State University and one season at Appalachian State. He recorded a career-high 1,066 receiving yards and nine touchdowns in his final season at Austin Peay.

Mauldin, a Charlotte native, began his career at Coastal Carolina University before spending two seasons at McNeese, where he recorded 341 receiving yards and two touchdowns last season.

Wadle stands at 6-foot-5, 245 pounds. He contributed on special teams as a freshman before recording nine receptions for 92 yards in 2025.

Additions on defense

Charlotte signed two defensive backs: redshirt junior cornerback Jameel Croft Jr. from the University of Kansas and redshirt sophomore safety Shamar McIntosh from the University of Maryland.

After redshirting in 2023, Croft appeared in 11 games across the 2024 and 2025 seasons, totaling three tackles and 55 kick return yards.

McIntosh appeared in six games over two seasons at Maryland, recording two tackles.

Charlotte also added defensive linemen redshirt sophomore D'Nas White from Catawba College and redshirt freshman Devin Ancrum from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, along with redshirt junior edge rusher Shaku Sangarie from Drake University and redshirt freshman long snapper Henry Searcy from Pittsburgh to round out the transfer class.

White, a North Carolina native, spent time at Florida State University before transferring to Catawba, where he recorded 10 tackles, one tackle for loss and one pass deflection.

Ancrum enrolled early at North Carolina but did not see game action. He was a three-star recruit out of Buford, Georgia.

Sangarie saw limited action in 2023 and 2024 before recording a breakout season in 2025 with 34 tackles, five tackles for loss, two sacks and two pass deflections.

Charlotte had 19 players leave through the transfer portal, but the 21 additions will compete for positions on the depth chart heading into the summer.



Opinion: Car dependency is literally destroying Charlotte

Noah Hughey | Staff Writer

Ava Weaver & Ahmed Ahmed/Niner Times

In November of 2025, Mecklenburg County voters closed a half-decade of back-and-forth by approving a 1% sales tax increase to fund a plethora of new transit projects in the Charlotte metropolitan area and across Mecklenburg County.

And yet, four months later, the only boots on the ground will be for a new station on the already complete Blue Line in the South End neighborhood. Instead, the city has stepped aside for the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to barrel through on a different project: expanding the I-77 Express Lanes with a new bridge running through several historically black Uptown neighborhoods and public parks.

Prophetically, resistance to new transportation projects has manifested in a priority focus that has once more shifted away from getting work done on the rails for ‘just one more lane, bro.’ If the city of Charlotte had a spine, and if the state of North Carolina had its priorities straight, this would not be a debate. Instead, the projected \$3.7 billion, with a ‘B,’ going into these so-called “critical” roads would go toward speeding up the construction of the infinitely more equitable rail projects the people of Charlotte have called for.

A contentious history

This is not a new story in Charlotte or America. In the 1940s and ‘50s, American

cities embraced the gospel of ‘urban renewal,’ a policy directive aimed at clearing out highly dense, underserved inner-city neighborhoods deemed unfit for development. These ‘slums’ would be replaced with new shops and housing, or paved over by the ever-expanding interstate and freeway system then under development.

But what the Federal Highway Administration says is “part of our culture as construction projects, as transportation in our daily lives, and as an integral part of the American way of life,” has long been a rosy-tinted fairy tale obfuscating reality; the construction of freeways in American cities has long been a racist attempt to destroy Black and Brown neighborhoods rather than give them money to develop themselves.

The ghost of Brooklyn

While not paved over by a highway, one historically Black neighborhood in Charlotte that was paved over is Brooklyn Village. Once called the “city within a city,” Brooklyn was the largest African-American neighborhood in the Carolinas by the 1920s, with both a swelling laborer class and a large professional base of lawyers, doctors and religious ministers.

The financial independence of Charlotte’s Black community threatened the spectre of white supremacy in the Queen City. Charlotte leaders used the very real problem of

crime and underdevelopment to argue that Brooklyn was nothing more than a self-sustaining slum that needed to be eradicated. But this idiotic quip totally ignores the very long-established fact that criminal conditions are essentially rooted in the economic conditions a community experiences.

But that did not stop the city from buying up the neighborhood, demolishing every remnant of Black Main Street, and paving over it. Decades later, Charlotte pitifully claims to “revitalize the heart of Brooklyn,” sheepishly renaming Stonewall Street, named for Confederate General Jonathan ‘Stonewall’ Jackson, to Brooklyn Village Avenue in 2022.

“They [the city] also promised us that they will rebuild Second Ward and they have not. They’ve destroyed everything that we have ever had,” former Brooklyn Village resident Clara Lewis said in an interview for the Levine Museum of the New South. “I have nowhere to go, we have nowhere to go to say ‘this is my school, this is where I graduated from,’ and it’s really sad that they’ve made a promise to us during redevelopment that they would rebuild Second Ward, and they did not.”

The (rails) ahead

Let’s face an immutable truth: car-centered development is simply unpleasant and hostile to human life. The amount of resources, space and time we spend prioritizing driving, housing and maintaining our cars is waste-

ful and, moreover, intensely damaging to our communities and the planet.

Transportation creates over a fifth of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions, according to the MIT Climate Portal. Public transportation options are infinitely less emissions-heavy than personal cars, and the underlying truism is that more, higher-quality transit options are far more conducive to the American ethos of freedom than car ownership ever has been. The ability to choose between your car, the light rail or the bus is far more freeing than only getting to choose the road.

This freedom allows us to build more public spaces that human beings, not their cars, can utilize and enjoy. This human-centered development is also far superior to redressing the intentional harm done to socioeconomic and racial communities whose hard-earned homes, businesses and community spaces are paved over for just one more lane.

It is not a fact of nature or a necessity for the growing population to pave over their potential homes and workplaces so they can drive away to hide in their cowardly suburbs. If we focused the time, money and effort being put into the I-77 expansion and other road projects on cleaner, more efficient, and yes, safer transit projects the people have voted for, we could build a stronger Charlotte rather than pave a parking lot over it.

Opinion: The media overemphasizes female fragility

Cory Nguyen | Staff Writer

The media tells us vulnerability is the necessary truth of femininity. Taylor Swift's teardrops on her guitar. Ariana Grande's public unraveling during the "Wicked" promotion. The film "Blonde" turning Marilyn Monroe into a spectacle of suffering. Beyoncé mining heartbreak and betrayal in "Lemonade." SZA bearing anxious, unfiltered longing or Viola Davis's Annalise Keating breaking down as a performance of raw truth.

Even in fiction, women are written to crack open: Rue Bennett spiraling in "Euphoria"; Olivia Pope unraveling behind power in "Scandal" or Daenerys Targaryen collapsing under the weight of destiny in "Game of Thrones." Across race and genre, the pattern holds: to be legible as feminine is to be seen breaking apart. Softness, pain and exposure are framed not as moments but as identity.

All eyes on the broken girl

The media keeps people watching ... and suffering? That is one of its most reliable attention hooks.

There is a pattern in how the media fixates on feminine suffering. Think Britney Spears during her breakdown, Lindsay Lohan, Amanda Bynes and even Cara Delevingne being labeled as ragged. It is not

just coverage, it is amplification. The narrative often feels stretched and spotlighted in a way that invites further unraveling — the turmoil itself becomes part of the spectacle.

It should be noted that men do not get scrutinized in quite the same way. Maybe Justin Bieber in 2014 is an exception, but even that felt tied to how his image was marketed at the time: largely toward a young, female audience, which shifts how his behavior was consumed and critiqued.

Something similar occurred with Liam Payne, but in reverse. The coverage around his struggles felt relatively muted until it surged all at once following his death on Oct. 16, 2024. The attention came not during the suffering, but at its endpoint.

Then there is the erasure piece, especially when it comes to Black women. Their suffering often does not get the same sustained visibility, or is dismissed altogether. You can see that in cases like Cassie Ventura and Sean 'Diddy' Combs, Megan Thee Stallion and Tory Lanez, or even going back to Giovonnie Samuels from "All That." There is a pattern in who gets exposed, who gets protected and who gets overlooked entirely.

Suffering as a plot device

Some women are able to flip that dynamic, repurposing anguish as something they control, without influence from the media. Swift is notorious for this, most powerfully on "The Tortured Poets Department," where she takes back the narrative of her relationships with Joe Alwyn and Matty Healy from her fans and the media. Same with Olivia Rodrigo in both "SOUR" and "GUTS." Winona Ryder, in "Girl, Interrupted," showcases her own anxieties through her performance. Lastly, Lupita Nyong'o as Patsey in "12 Years a Slave."

However, these moments come at the expense of the women and femmes' experiences. They shouldn't have to market their heartbreak or personal struggles to be palatable to a greater cause than themselves, that is, for the sake of art.

For the audience, these displays of feminine vulnerability train consumers to normalize and possibly overemphasize the suffering of women. Not only is it simply there, but it is 'media-ified.' Glamorous, beautiful, evergreen in the fabric of the medium in which it is produced. Every sad femme is a moment captured rather than lived in.

Evelyn McHale, the most beautiful suicide, was atop a car. Resusci Anne, better known as Rescue Annie, is a girl who drowned in the Seine in the 1800s. Pale and fragile. Dead and beautiful. The best girls.

It should be noted that this rarely, if ever, happens for Black women, though it should never happen to anybody at all.

No piece of media better represents this than "Life is Strange." The main villain is set on framing girls into fragments of fragility.

At its worst, the media can be the same way.

Suffering as a plot device for whom?

It all comes down to this. Suffering is entertaining. It drives stories forward. This is where feminine fragility is weaponized.

Back to the character of Patsey in "12 Years a Slave," who is a prime example of poorly portrayed Black feminine suffering. Her role in a pivotal scene in the film as a quiet sufferer at the hands of a sexually exploitative enslaver is not used to showcase her pain. Rather, it is used as a device to give the male lead an understanding of how powerless he is and to feel the toll of being unable to protect her.

This is key. Often, women's pain is used as a plot device for other, often masculine, people's narratives.

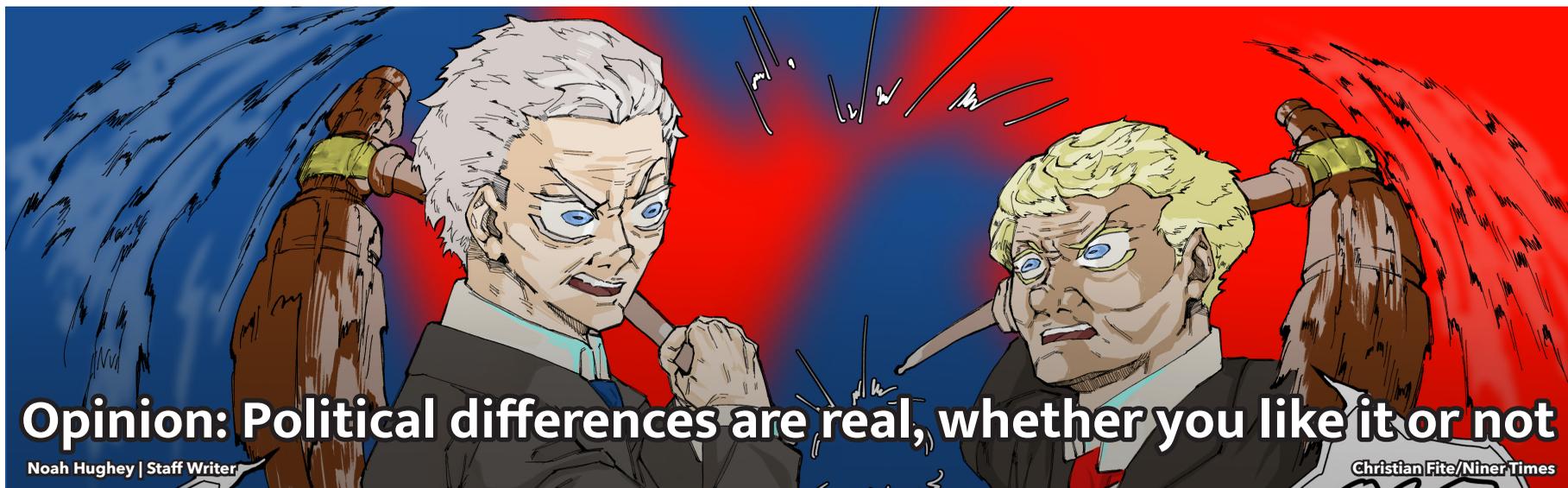
So women shouldn't suffer then?

People will experience pain. The difference is that, for femininity, it comes at the increased cost of being used as upholstery in another person's living room; an added embellishment of another's emotional landscape rather than its own fundamental design.

Simply put, women should be able to experience pain and grief and loss without it turning into a commodity.



Skyler Nyutu/Niner Times



Opinion: Political differences are real, whether you like it or not

Noah Hughey | Staff Writer

Christian Fite/NinerTimes

The modern political world is irrevocably polarized. Today, Americans' political differences gap so widely, and land so heavily in their lives, that out-party hatred outpaces in-party love as a predictor of how Americans vote, and politics impacts the lives of Americans in such a way that it causes stress that they have to cope with or act upon.

Political 'junkies' and activists have come to argue, more so after the release of the Epstein files, that these political differences are actually the product of a corrupt cabal dividing the people on highly publicized issues that stymie progress in government on more important ones. For them, America has been taken out of a time of 'unity' that, if we simply eradicate whichever cabal is manufacturing our divide, we can easily return to.

The political junkies get polarization dead wrong, and forgo the responsibility they have to engage with people on both substantive policy issues and normative moral values issues, instead writing off their disagreement as the product of some ridiculous conspiracy that they are at the center of.

Paradise lost

Part of how the political junkies get polarization wrong is that they place it in opposition to a past that isn't actually there. To them, there is some mythicized point in American political history when people got along, cordially disagreed and moved on with their lives. It is the advent of some outside thing, whether it be an evil cabal, the internet or some combination of the two, that has taken Americans from this mythicized past into our polarized present.

The myth of America's unified past likely overstates the 'unity' we understand to have occurred at various periods in American political history, defined by 'party unity,' in which political divisions between the major

parties lessened or disappeared. One such time was the "era of good feelings" following the stalemate in the War of 1812. Much like the war itself, America's "unity" at the time was more the result of the problems the public ignored or erased through revisionist history.

"If you're looking at periods when you have states that have a really common thick conception of the common good, you're looking at revolutionary France, you're looking at Third Reich Germany, you're looking at early days [of the] Soviet Union," UNC Charlotte Political Science Professor Joshua Miller said. "When you have folks who are really committed to this idea that, 'here is the common will, here is the common good, here is the thing.' And if it, as Rousseau would say, defects from that, then it's just wrong."

At various points in the nation's history, America has experienced something like a national unity. But this unity is not some universal absolute with no statistical outliers. Part of what makes a state commit to one eternal goal is the state's abdication of all other goals as being not worthy enough or unpatriotic.

Think about the Trump administration's successful effort to erase the Obama-era climate rule that determined greenhouse gases were a matter of public safety. History books will likely paint America as unilaterally in favor of this change. After all, Trump won the election. And yet, obviously, he is being contested.

Any idea that George Washington's presidency was uncontroversial for everyone in the new country would be absurd. Especially considering his hawkish attitude toward using the military to intervene in civil conflicts. Some people likely felt unhappy about such impressive force, especially after the war just won to abandon all forms of kingship.

The role of democracy

As any political scientist will tell you, the animosity of American democracy is precisely the point.

"The opposite end of the spectrum is the work of someone like [Brown University Political Philosopher] Bonnie Honig, who is going to say, 'well, you know, democracy is an agonistic prospect, what it's really about is different folks competing with each other over power,'" Miller said.

"No one group can get maximum power, in a Madisonian sense, because then they could oppress the others, and so the beauty is we fracture constantly, and we need to keep things as fractured as possible so as to prevent any one group from dominating others."

And yet, the problem we face with modern polarization is that it obstructs the democratic process. Both sides fold policy utopias into large, omnibus spending bills and policy packages rather than push forward on each issue individually, freezing state employee checks and necessary public services that both sides agree are important to engage with gimmicky, made-for-TV issues.

Alternatively, we can imagine the contention over Department of Homeland Security (DHS) funding as an example of a better way to pursue ideological goals without stalling necessary policy packages.

"But the DHS's lack of funding hasn't held up all the other funding in the way that it would have been if it had been one big bill," Miller continued. "So that might be like a productive way, institutionally, of thinking about how these things practically can be instituted."

This can be hard to imagine as a productive way to disagree on issues deeply. And yet, it works. As the Trump administration wields the department as a powerful ideological police force, Democrats could have held

up funding for the entire government, as is usually the case. But by isolating the issue in its own context, we not only see the contours of the disagreement that make it real, but also a path along which we can productively pursue that disagreement.

Where the normative meets the normal

There are many issues that many Americans agree on, but often disagree on the practical application of policies to address them. But this doesn't mean that their disagreement is manufactured, and it doesn't belittle the serious normative moral values that they disagree on.

"It's like, the moral stuff is important only insofar as how it connects to the boring stuff," Miller said. "And the challenge today is that, like, often people just don't connect to the boring stuff because they think that it [moral values] takes precedence over it."

No, political junkies, your roommate's position on the Second Amendment or abortion is probably not a total fabrication created by Jeffrey Epstein or Donald Trump to gain power or money. Powerful people probably do pick up on the already existing gaps in American opinion and exploit them for short-term gain. But this does not have to be the standard in America, or anywhere.

You do not have to like your neighbor. You don't even have to be nice to them. But you do share a world with them. And if you sit around expecting everything and everyone to one day perfectly conform to your beliefs, you will waste your lifetime only to die disappointed. Know the world not because of the fleeting myths the internet tells you, know it because you live and work and shape it every day, one boring zoning meeting at a time.