



NINERTIMES

Student-driven news since 1947

Sept. 24, 2025

CELEBRATING HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

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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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Wes Packham/Niner Times

Events to watch for on and off campus

2025 Actuarial Science Day & Career Fair
Sept. 26, 10 A.M.-4 P.M.
Lucas Room, Cone Center

CAB on Broadway: Wicked
Sept. 26, 8-11 P.M.
Belk Theater at Blumenthal
Performing Arts Center

Financial Services Career Fair
Sept. 30, 4-8 P.M.
Popp-Martin Student Union
Room 340

Women's volleyball vs East Carolina
Oct. 1, 6-8 P.M.
Halton Arena

Halloween Costume Making Workshop
Oct. 3, 1-3 P.M.
Area 49 Makerspace

Campus Beautification Day
Oct. 7, 9 A.M.-2 P.M.
East Village/Lot 4

NOTES FROM THE NEWSROOM:

Our country was built on immigrants, let's respect them

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor

Our grandparents and great-grandparents braved the unimaginable to give us the lives we have today. Many of them left everything behind just to start over in a strange land. When they got to the United States, no one handed them a job, a home or an education. They took it upon themselves to carve things out of hardship and determination to make a new life for themselves.

While you may only know the glamorized version of the countries they came from because they are 'tropical' or 'vacation spots,' the truth is that a majority of these countries experienced blackouts, dictatorship regimes and unlivable conditions. The phrase, 'the American dream,'

does not just symbolize material gain, but rather a profound understanding that life can be better for everyone.

James Truslow Adams' book, "The Epic of America," published in 1931, put it perfectly:

"The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement—it is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position."

There are 1,126,690 international students in the U.S., that's your classmate. 22,942,000 U.S.-born residents live with one immigrant parent; that's your neighbor. 3,855,100 entrepreneurs are immigrants, that's the owner of your favorite clothing brand. There are 30,680,600 immigrants in the workforce, including the Charlotteans you see walking down the streets of Uptown.

Respecting immigrants means honoring the sacrifices of those who came before us. It means remembering that nearly all of us have roots somewhere else. If we respect our own family histories, we should extend that respect to the immigrants who are writing the next chapter of America's story.

From the Charlotte police logs (9/11 - 9/18)

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

The following are some incidents in the UNC Charlotte campus police logs from Sept. 11 to 18, 2025.

Sept. 11 Investigate

An officer responded to the Student Union after reports of individuals yelling at students. Upon arrival, the officer confirmed they were preaching and not disruptive.

Sept. 12 DWI

Officers responded to Rowe Arts after reports of a vehicle hitting objects and driving on the walkway. The driver was arrested for DWI and property damage.

Sept. 16 Larceny of a motor vehicle

A stolen vehicle was located near Wallis Hall. Police stopped the car, finding two male suspects and an infant. One fled but was arrested after being found in a residence hall. Both suspects were charged, the infant remained safe.

Latin American Festival connects culture and community in South Charlotte

Madeline Andrews | Staff Writer

The Latin American Coalition hosted the 35th annual Latin American Festival on Saturday, Sept. 20, in Ballantyne's Backyard.

The event hosted visitors of all ages from noon to 9 p.m. With the temperature reaching nearly 90 degrees in the sun, children and adults alike carried fans and enjoyed ice cream, taking shade atop the sloping hills surrounding the festival grounds.

The main attraction of the event was the concert stage, where dance groups took turns performing traditional dances in costumes inspired by the flags of their respective countries.

In 2025, the event drew over 20,000 attendees, which is roughly a 6,000-guest increase from the previous year. The increase follows the can-

cellation of the Hispanic Heritage Festival of the Carolinas in Charlotte. The Hispanic Heritage Festival is typically the largest Hispanic Heritage Month celebration in the state, drawing roughly 60,000 every year.

This year, it was cancelled due to concerns about a potential Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) presence at the event, leaving the Latin American Festival to bridge the gap.

Celebrating heritage through dance, dress and national pride

Natalie ran the Nicaragua tent and also participated in her country's dance. She wore a white and royal blue tiered dress with the national coat of arms placed in the center, and red sacuanjoche flowers in her hair, the national flower of Nicaragua. Her tent featured handmade instruments for sale, including a large wooden marimba and hand-painted red and blue maracas.

"I come out here every year to promote my culture and let other people know about my

country," Natalie said. After five years of representing Nicaragua at the festival, she plans to continue the tradition.

"There's a lot of diversity in Charlotte; it's important to know who our neighbors are so we can get to know different perspectives from people here and from around the world."

Natalie was not alone; her tent was surrounded by tents with representatives from each country, also wearing flags and national colors, selling fruit juices, flags, T-shirts, jewelry and other colorful items, all chosen to represent their home countries. The country tents formed a semicircle to the right of the performance stage.

To the left, a collection of food trucks, tents and open-faced grills filled the valley with the smells of empanadas, tacos, grilled vegetables and fresh fruit. Each vendor had a unique take on Latin American cuisine, with some focusing on dishes from a single country and others combining to offer a fusion of cultures and flavors. All were ready to serve an eager crowd that floated between vendors and attractions.

For children, there was a large, inflated art installation that resembled the walls of a bounce house. Parents stood on the outside of the inflatables, letting their kids play together among the kaleidoscope of colors that the light created inside the clear, bright walls. There were also free coloring books, a face-painting booth and several stands that sold stuffed animals and

Hello Kitty merchandise.

Facing the stage and connecting the food vendors to the country representatives was a long line of business and nonprofit organizations offering giveaways and details on their services as they helped sponsor the festival.

Nonprofits and volunteers use festival to connect with Latin community

Ryan is a volunteer for the Hispanic Federation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to outreach for the entire Latin community. Throughout the day, he circled the festival grounds with a clipboard, asking people if they were registered to vote.

"Everyone is going to have different statuses in their citizenship process. If they weren't born here, we try to serve them wherever they are," Ryan explained.

The Hispanic Federation offers a bilingual helpline that is free for callers in both Spanish and English, designed to help navigate the American health care system. This helpline connects callers with resources to help lower the costs of prescriptions and medical services.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, over 75% of undocumented individuals express uncertainty about accessing relief programs due to fears of being deported or losing protected status. Additionally, half of all undocumented immigrants reported not seeking medical care when they wanted to, due to these same fears.

Ryan has been working with the Hispanic Federation for over a year, and this was his second Latin American Festival as a staff member.

"It's just wonderful to see people from so many places and walks of life," Ryan said. "We always get a good reception because these communities understand what is needed here, allowing them to learn from us, and always giving us the chance to learn from them."

Festival gives locals a taste of Latin America close to home

Among the crowds of people excited to experience their own cultures and provide outreach to different communities, some people were there to learn.

Madison is a Ballantyne native, living only a few blocks from the festival. "I was honestly really excited for the food," Madison said, who spent 20 minutes searching for the perfect empanadas.

"It was so cool to see everyone's culture and what they chose to show us to represent their country. With everything going on in the world, I'm so thankful that people can still come together and celebrate."



Wes Packham/ Niner Times



Art of the deck: Skate culture preserved at the Mint Museum

Wes Packham | Arts & Culture Editor

Bonding over drinks and a shared passion for skating, attendees and contributors alike gathered to see Mint Museum Randolph's newest exhibit, viewing rare skate decks, original artwork and archival media spanning over four decades.

It was the opening night for "Central Impact: Skateboarding's Art and Influence," hosted by Deckaid in collaboration with Black Sheep Skate Sheep. As a mutual project created by husband and wife Tim and Sarah Anderson, Deckaid focuses on showcasing collector archives in celebration of skateboarding's influential history.

With over 100 decks on display, the exhibit showcased rare boards from deck collectors from along the East Coast, local photography and archive VHS videos.

Origins of Deckaid

Tim's deck collection first began with his hunt for the first deck he owned from the early '90s, a Chris Pastras World Industries board from 1991. A hand-me-down from his friend, it served as his first intro to skateboarding, and Tim was able to get his hands on an unused copy two decades after he first put wheels to pavement.

"It's a very basic graphic. It's a nine-inch wide stained deck with a graphic in the middle of a boy holding his hands up, not the most groundbreaking. I found the artist who did it, Marc McKee, and I was able to acquire the original art

and the deck. He's done work for Deckaid before. It was a nice full-circle to get him involved in Deckaid," Tim said.

What started as the simple hunt for a lost piece of personal history grew to a collection of around 150 decks.

The Deckaid project first hit the ground when Tim and Sarah moved to Nyack, N.Y., in 2013, when Tim's collection had around several dozen decks.

"At the time, I was advocating for a skate park in Nyack, New York, and he [Tim] was collecting skateboards and had amassed a pretty big collection," Sarah said. "He had a bet where I was like, 'If I can get the land allocation for the skate park, then you have to take the collection out of our basement, show it to people and do an art show.'"

Since the first show in 2013, Deckaid has held 11 skateboard art exhibitions, all while supporting nonprofits focused on supporting marginalized youth. Deckaid has held exhibits across the nation, including collaborations with Girl and Chocolate Skateboards, and being part of an exhibit at the Museum of the Moving Image in Queens, N.Y.

Tim and Sarah are both from New York, and traveled to North Carolina for the installation and reception of the exhibit, in addition to the installation team, friends and members of the community who came to support from across the country.

Central Impact

While some might see a scratched-up wooden plank, collectors and curators see decades of unique design, culture and memory.

"As we were working, the security guards loved it. They were like, 'This is really cool. We've never seen anything like this in this museum,'" Sarah said.

The collection on view at Mint Museum Randolph is Deckaid's first standalone museum exhibit they've showcased, as well as the longest. Deckaid typically holds 24-hour showcases, so being open for four months allows for more to come and support.

The exhibit is set up around the

central amphitheater, displaying a slideshow of photography from nearby Kilborne DIY Skatepark, representing the local impact. Revolving around the amphitheater are the decks, photos and VHS tapes representing the national influence.

Besides Tim's collection as the primary contributor to the exhibit, two other collectors hailing from South Carolina and Virginia, were invited to bring their deck collections to have on display.

Pat Lowery came from Richmond, Va. His collection is focused on decks from the late '80s and early '90s. He first heard of the plan for the exhibit around two months before the opening date.

"I remember either Sarah or Tim put up a post asking if anyone has some '80s boards that they want to show off in this version of Deckaid? I thought, 'North Carolina, it's not far. I'd love to show stuff off, so let's do it,'" Lowery said.

Covering a blind spot in Tim's collection, the boards cover what Lowery described as the "biggest evolution" of skateboard shapes from what he's seen. It was his first time displaying his collection to the public. Out of the roughly 50 decks he owns, Lowery chose 24 to bring down from Richmond.

"I'm stoked to have it up, but it definitely feels a little weird. I've spent years looking for these boards, sometimes talking to people for years just to acquire one. Letting them go away for four months feels strange because there's so much emotional significance behind them," Lowery said.

In addition to Lowery, Andrew Thomas from Columbia, S.C., contributed boards from his own skating and collecting experience. As an avid collector of books and records and a skater of over three decades, collecting decks felt natural to him. To have his boards on display in a museum felt special to him, both for the art and

the culture surrounding it.

"I don't feel so alone; there are other people who appreciate these kinds of things," Thomas said. "Me and him [friend and viewer Steve Fletch] talk every day, and the first time we met face-to-face is tonight. You can build these connections and community."

Beyond the boards

Keeping in line with Deckaid's goals, the proceeds from the exhibit will be donated to support the Charlotte Skate Foundation, who work to support and build several skateparks within the greater Charlotte area.

"This is a whole side project. And our 501(c)(3) is volunteer-run. Nobody takes a salary or anything like that. We didn't want to make money off it because we already have jobs. We wanted to be able to give back to the communities that we visit," Tim explained.

For Sarah, the goal isn't to prove skateboarding belongs in a museum—it's about building the culture, saving the works and uplifting marginalized communities around the country.

"Skateboarding doesn't need legitimacy from anybody. But there's this really rich history, and it's fun to have people become aware of it," Sarah said.

The exhibit will be available for the public to view at the Mint Museum Randolph until Jan. 4, 2026.



Wes Packham/Niner Times



Artist Duff Woon Kee Yong celebrates sisterhood in art exhibit, ‘Mei Mei’

Madeline Andrews | Staff Writer

‘Mei Mei (妹妹),’ a collection by artist Duff ‘Ookee’ Woon Kee Yong, was held on display in Rowe Galleries from Aug. 13 to Sept 19. The collection is foremost a tribute to all of the women who shape us. Through recollection and repetition, ‘Mei Mei’ reflects multiple meanings of sisterhood that Yong has experienced at different points in his life.

Born in Singapore, Yong earned his Master of Fine Arts in Computer Art with a concentration in Motion Graphics in 2001 from the Savannah College of Art and Design. Shortly after receiving his degree, he began teaching motion media design at his alma mater, where he continues to lecture today.

“After finishing my last solo show at Telfair Museum, which felt very self-focused, I wanted to shift the spotlight toward those connections,” Yong explained.

As a collection, ‘Mei Mei’ is inspired by sisterhood, dedicated to the many women who have helped him along his journey as both a person and an artist. The pieces are multimodal, with chosen materials holding the form for his black and white illustrations of varying size and composition.

Yong describes the practice of creating these pieces as automatic, or stream-of-consciousness.

“That method allows emotion and memory to

surface in abstract ways,” Yong described.

After the outline has been established, Yong refines the work into the figures and shapes seen in the final pieces, which Yong calls ‘Ookee,’ eponymous to his artist’s name.

‘Mei Mei’ was in the lower gallery in Rowe, welcoming guests into the building as soon as they entered. One piece was painted directly in the corner, connecting two walls with the black and white string-like loops. The paintings to the right and left of the corner display were held on large slabs of wood, with the orange wood-grain absorbing the light, beautifully contrasting the dark shapes above it. A shadow frame held a pink sticky note painting, with a figurine of a man standing, looking at the artwork. Two shadow boxes held small combs, covered in a pattern, with the frame itself also painted. Some of the works resembled a ball of yarn starting to come undone, others like pulmonary veins leading to and from anatomical hearts.

“The repetition of this process across the collection mirrors the ongoing, daily practice of kinship itself, small threads that come together to make a stronger whole,” Yong explained.

Yong has one birth sister, who grew up with him in Singapore, but is deeply connected to the women he has met throughout his life, whom he defines as his chosen sisters.

“That idea of sisterhood has deeply influenced my practice: it keeps me connected to vulnerability, tenderness and resilience, all of which surface in my work,” Yong said.

When ‘Mei Mei’ first went on exhibit, Yong’s birth-sister, Valerie, was not able to attend in person. She sent flowers not only to him, but also to his chosen sister Lexi, who symbolically took her place at the exhibit. Valerie also wrote a note for Lexi along with the flowers, which read: “Thank you for being the lovely sister for Duffy.”

“That gesture captured everything I wanted this collection to honor, two sisters, one by blood and one by choice, both sharing their love for me across distance,” Yong said. “‘Mei Mei’ is my way of recognizing that kind of layered kinship, where presence goes beyond proximity and love travels through both family and chosen bonds.”

Mei Mei is not only a reflection of his personal experience with sisterhood, but also whatever comes through for the viewer of his work.

“My hope is that when someone stands in front of the pieces, they sense both the strength and the vulnerability embedded in the materials themselves, mirroring the layered experiences of care, accountability and love that relationships hold,” Yong said. “Ultimately, the collection is about recognition: seeing yourself in another, and knowing you are not alone in your journey.”



Ahmed Ahmed/Niner Times



Courtesy of Susana Cisneros

Translating achievement: Susana Cisneros champions Hispanic student success

Deonna Dickens | Lead Writer

After moving from Tucumán, Argentina, to Charlotte in 2005, Susana Cisneros found her true calling, turning obstacles into opportunities to inspire and uplift her community.

Before coming to Charlotte, Cisneros was on the track to becoming a criminal law attorney. She graduated from the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba in 2004 with her Abogada and Procuradora, which is equivalent to a bachelor's degree in law.

"The United States has a different system. In the United States, it's called common law, and in Argentina, it's civil law, meaning we use a code, so my degree didn't transfer," Cisneros said. "At the beginning, I thought about doing law school, but in order to be able to do law school, I needed to have so much English and expertise."

When Cisneros began learning the English language, she admits that it was a challenging transition from speaking solely Spanish.

"It was very demanding," Cisneros said. "I was studying every single day for about two straight years; reading, writing, listening to music, listening to different radio stations that would have talk shows that I could actually follow through the story."

I watched the same movie for three months so that I would be able to have first the context, then the pronunciation, then the articulation."

Cisneros earned her Master of Arts in Spanish with a concentration in Translation and Translating Studies in 2009 at UNC Charlotte.

She wanted to use her degree to become an English translator in Argentina. During her second semester, though, she gained an opportunity that changed her trajectory.

"In the second semester of my Master's program, my department invited me to teach, and I just fell in love with teaching and learning and having the opportunity to interact on a different level with [Spanish]. That was fabulous," Cisneros said.

Cisneros has been teaching at the University since 2008, working with students learning Spanish at the elementary, intermediate and advanced levels. She was also invited to teach Spanish to adults at the YMCA in Harris for several years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"For a while, I used to teach Spanish for adults

at the YMCA, and the background of the adult students was young people who were about to get married, so they wanted to be able to communicate with their families-in-law. There were elders who wanted to communicate with their grandchildren. There were doctors and financial advisors who needed to communicate with their clients," Cisneros said.

Aside from teaching, Cisneros designed and implemented the 49er Intensive Transition Program for Hispanic and Latinx (FIT HLX). The program is an immersive experience that introduces students to the campus community, familiarizes them with Charlotte's support services and encourages collaborative study with their peers.

"It's more geared towards first-generation students who have been admitted to UNC Charlotte. This is a summer intensive opportunity," Cisneros said. "It's a week-long program, held the week before school starts, and students can move onto campus. The goal of the 49er Intensive Transition Program is to give them the opportunity to feel the pressure without the penalty."

Cisneros has helped the program's initiative for three years, and her efforts have not gone unnoticed. On Sept. 11, 2025, Cisneros won the Teaching-Focused Award.

"I'm still processing," Cisneros said. "It was not expected. It is a recognition that has to do with so many people that support me, that mentored me, that gave me opportunities, and so many students that trusted me and my teaching style. It was a moment to actually look back at what I have done in the last 18 years at UNC Charlotte."

As the experiences that power her own advocacy stems from outside the classroom, Cisneros encourages her students to bring their own perspective in learning.

"Sharing not just in the classroom through the book and the material, but also sharing my life experiences and asking the students to share. Of course, in the community, there are a lot of things students can actually learn better if they move into the community. There's so much beauty in practicing the language in authentic ways," Cisneros said.

As her career and service continue, Cisneros plans to remain an advocate for the Hispanic and Latino community on and off campus.

‘I couldn’t let that be the end of my story,’ Wilfredo Flores’ journey from trailer park to Ph.D.

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor

When Dr. Wilfredo Flores stands in front of his classroom at UNC Charlotte, he’s not just teaching writing; he’s living proof that resilience can rewrite any destiny.

Born and raised in San Antonio, Flores lived with his sister and foster parents in a trailer park, navigating a childhood marked by limited resources, yet turning the unthinkable situation into a reason to keep going.

Flores had what he described as a rocky start in higher education. After living under foster care from ages three to 18, he left home to begin a new chapter of his life. Flores started at the University of Texas at San Antonio, pursuing a bachelor’s degree in English, but after three years, he dropped out because his Pell Grant had run out.

Like many of the 51% of Hispanic/Latino youth who are first-generation college students, Flores did not have a family member who was experienced with anything related to higher education. He shared that his father, from El Salvador, and his mother, who was Mexican-American, died when he was just three years old.

Finding his way back

Looking back at that time in his life, Flores had a moment when he realized he needed to

start asking questions to get himself on the right track.

“Not having any family members that had gone through that experience who could tell me, to ‘just go talk to the counselor,’ really did kind of shoot me in the foot, for lack of a better metaphor. But I decided I couldn’t let that be the end of my story,” Flores said.

Three years later, he re-enrolled at the University of Texas at San Antonio. After working in the writing center, he came across the opportunity to learn about and apply for graduate school. Flores later attended Texas Tech University to pursue his Master in Technical Communication & Rhetoric in 2014.

Flores did not stop there—he applied and was accepted at Michigan State University to get his fully funded Ph.D. in Writing, Rhetoric and Composition/Writing Studies in 2017.

Leaving the comfort of his community back in San Antonio, where 64.4% of its population identifies as Hispanic or Latino, Flores felt as though he was worlds away from home when moving to East Lansing, Mich., where people couldn’t even pronounce his name correctly.

After the initial fears of not feeling like he would fit in, Flores said that he was still able to find pockets of familiar faces on streets states away.

“That just kind of iterated to me, that Latinos will always find each other and keep each other in company and help each other, speak Spanish for each other, all that stuff that makes me feel good and resilient,” Flores said.

Being a part of the 6%

The feeling of isolation in the classroom is not unique for many Hispanic/Latino students, as

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“I was constantly being mistaken for other Latino students or called by the wrong name. At first, it hurt. But after a while, I realized it sucks to be them, that they can’t even tell people apart.”

- Dr. Wilfredo Flores

the population as a whole makes up just 6% of students who receive a doctoral degree, despite Hispanics/Latinos making up 20% of the United States population.

“I was constantly being mistaken for other Latino students or called by the wrong name. At first, it hurt,” Flores admitted. “But after a while, I realized it sucks to be them, that they can’t even tell people apart.”

While many may think the mispronunciation of a name is nothing but an innocent mistake, after repeated weeks of what felt like no effort from his peers or professors, Flores began to tell people to call him ‘Will.’

“[To have to change] a part of my identity, but it’s also that you don’t recognize my personhood enough to care about my name in a way that, ‘Oh, let me learn how to pronounce it or say it right,’ or ‘make sure I repeat it in my head enough to where I won’t just say like William or Wilfred,’” Flores said.

Growing up speaking both Spanish and English shaped his path in unexpected ways. Though he now understands Spanish fluently, he admits speaking it can feel challenging, especially as someone whose academic work in writing studies and rhetoric is rooted in English.

Flores loved reading as a young child and continued to follow that passion into his studies. During his doctoral studies, he explored Mexican-American experiences in Michigan, focusing on the history of migrant farmworkers from Texas who settled in Lansing.

While inspired by his passion for his studies, Flores shared that his sister, who shared his foster care upbringing, pursued her Master of Social Work to help at-risk students directly. Although they have very different paths of education, Flores believes that both he and his sister are making a meaningful impact with their work.

Teaching with empathy

Now an assistant professor at UNC Charlotte, Flores brings the same lessons he learned during his time as a student to his current students. At 36 years old, he knows what it’s like to juggle jobs, family responsibilities and coursework all at once, so he aims to create a space in his classroom for students to be honest and comfortable with their lives and learning.

“I remember coming to class exhausted after working, getting off work in the morning, taking like, a 10-minute nap and then heading to campus and having two classes in a row,” Flores recalled. “So when students are falling asleep in class or texting, I get it, it’s fine. I try to make class less lecture-like and more just talking and being together. I value [that style] a lot because as a student, it made me feel like I was part of a community, versus just getting lectured to.”

For many Hispanic/Latino students, seeing a professor who shares their cultural background is a powerful experience. Despite being a predominantly white institution, UNC Charlotte’s student body is still made up of 3,680 Hispanic/Latino identifying students—approximately 11.4% of the student body.

This growing community is evident in the rise of student organizations, such as the Latin American Student Organization or the Latinx Student Union. Over the course of the fall 2025 semester, these organizations have hosted some of the largest campus events of the academic year so far.

Flores highlighted that the current political climate has definitely sparked some classroom conversations over topics that are heavy with the Hispanic/Latino community. While he can’t speak on it to his class as an employee of the University, he still prides himself on being there for students who do need to talk.

“Growing up, I remember [when] 9/11 [happened] and people remember the towers and everything, but I remember [that was around when] ICE became a thing. So because I grew up in a trailer park and we had a lot of undocumented folks who lived in that area, I remember them just being scared of ICE, not leaving the house and letting people know not to go to work at certain times,” Flores said. “So it’s interesting, growing up seeing that, and now it’s resurging again.”

Dr. Flores has built an impressive career centered on advocacy, education and community-driven change. He is a co-founder and former organizer with Queering Medicine, a Lansing-based grassroots collective dedicated to improving queer health, and he continues to amplify marginalized voices as co-producer of the Storying Sex podcast and oral history project.

In addition, he has contributed to scholarship and public discourse as part of the editorial collective for the Q+Public book series, published by Rutgers University Press. Across his research, teaching and service, Flores works for ethical community engagement and sustainable change, combining theory and practice to create more livable futures for those who need them most.

Flores hopes to be a figure of inspiration for these students on campus and encourage them to pursue their dreams, including pursuing a master’s or doctoral degree.

“It’s not easy, but it’s worth it, and it’ll be extra worth it knowing that you persevered through all the things that are keeping you from getting there,” Flores said. “There’s really no other better feeling, I think, at least anything I’ve experienced, professional and accomplishment-wise.”



Courtesy of Wilfredo Flores

HISPANIC AND LATIN AMERICA

1955

The first Spanish Club is formed at Charlotte College for students taking Spanish language classes.



1965

A Spanish language program is established. Professor emeritus Edward Hopper developed the program and taught until his retirement in 2018.



2004

The Alpha Lambda Chapter of Chi Upsilon Sigma National Latin Sorority, Inc. was chartered on July 21, becoming the first Latina and multicultural Greek organization at the University.



2000

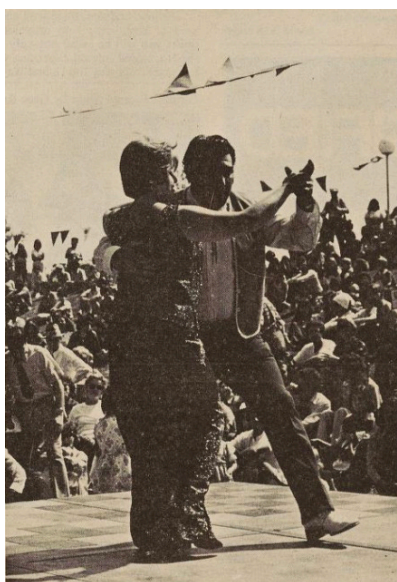
Students create the Latin American Student Organization (LASO). The organization promotes educational and cultural exchange, and now, in 2025, it maintains over 100 student members.

2007

The Gamma Iota Chapter of Lambda Theta Phi Latin Fraternity, Inc. is chartered on May 6. It was the first Latino fraternity at the University.

1975

UNC Charlotte hosts its first International Festival, featuring Latin American and Hispanic countries.

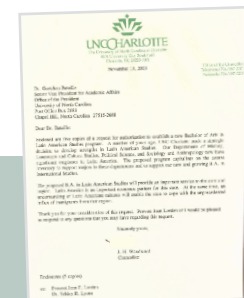


1994

The Hispanic and Latin student population at UNC Charlotte reaches 171 students.

2003

Faculty request the creation of a Latin American Studies major, and it is approved. They cited increased interest, with 200+ students enrolled in Latin American history courses and 125 students majoring in Spanish. The program officially starts in 2005.



HISpanic HISTORY

AT UNC CHARLOTTE

Sunnya Hadavi | Lead Writer

Images from Niner Times archives and courtesy of respective organizations



2020

LatinX Student Union (LXSU) becomes an official student organization on Sept. 20. In its first year, LXSU contributed 500+ community service hours and received the Student Organization of the Year award.

2009

Hispanic and Latin American student enrollment exceeds 1,000 for the first time.

The Diversified Greek Council is established by the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life.

The Mu Chapter of Psi Sigma Phi Multicultural Fraternity, Inc. is chartered on Nov. 29.



2016

Latin students are recognized at the first Latinx Student Graduation ceremony. This tradition has continued since.



2012

The Epsilon Phi Chapter of Lambda Theta Alpha Sorority, Inc. is found in October that year.

Dr. Yvette Huet creates the Latinx/Hispanic Faculty and Staff Caucus on Oct. 8.



2017

The Beta Phi chapter of La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity, Inc., is chartered on Nov. 28.

2014

The Latino Student Services Office opens at UNC Charlotte. The office provides family members with bilingual resources and support, and collaborates with community organizations to promote college access. The office remained active until 2018, when they stopped posting on all social media.

The Beta Chi Chapter of Omega Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. is founded on Nov. 30.

2021

UNC Charlotte becomes the No. 1 institution in North Carolina in awarding Latin graduates with bachelor's degrees, according to Excelencia in Education. In the 2019-2020 academic year, 591 Latin students graduated with a bachelor's degree.

2025

Hispanic and Latin American student enrollment reaches record highs each year. In fall 2025, enrollment reached an all-time high of 4,780 students.





Courtesy of Niner Guides

Kyle Boucher | Staff Writer

UNC Charlotte offers Spanish-language campus tours, enabling Hispanic/Latino students and their families to overcome language barriers, access essential information about college life and feel more included within the growing campus community.

This year, 3,680 undergraduate Hispanic/Latino identifying students are attending UNC Charlotte. Many Hispanic/Latino families face language barriers that make it difficult to feel welcome on campus.

Previously, students spent a significant amount of time translating for their families during tours, often missing important information.

The new Spanish-language tours bridge this gap. Led by trained Spanish-speaking guides, the tours enable parents to ask questions comfortably and experience campus life in a language they are familiar with.

“When Hispanic families see somebody who speaks Spanish, it makes them feel more comfortable to ask questions,” second-year student and Spanish-language tour guide, Magdiel Trejo, said.

Spanish tours also reassure parents who may feel anxious about sending their children to college. A 2020 survey found that 51% of Hispanic students are the first in their families to attend college, which can lead to concerns about campus safety and student life.

“A lot of them [Hispanic families] tell us that this is their first time stepping foot on a universi-

ty campus, and that it’s a really good experience,” graduate student and Spanish-language tour guide Miriam Vargas Saenz said.

Breaking language barriers

Many Hispanic parents appreciate the opportunity to take a tour with someone who once came from a family with similar reservations. Parents often express how reassuring it is to know that Charlotte is a culturally safe place where all students are respected. The thriving Hispanic community helps bring peace of mind to parents, allowing them to experience their own culture in higher education.

“Usually, the parents will make comments about how this has been really helpful, how they really like the University, and the fact that we have this service for them. It means a lot, and you really see it in their reactions,” third-year student and Spanish-language tour guide, Lissa Diaz De Leon said.

Hispanic parents unfamiliar with higher education may not be well-informed about the college application process, including how to apply for scholarships and make living arrangements.

Language access provides a clearer understanding of college applications, scholarship opportunities and housing for many families.

Although the information that tour guides go over is available online, it is often written in English only. The translated tours create space for

conversations in Spanish, helping parents feel empowered and involved in their students’ decision-making.

The Spanish tour guides also help incoming Hispanic students connect with someone who has experienced their struggles before. Common struggles that tour guides share with incoming students are an uneasiness about starting university, leaving home and losing some sense of Hispanic culture.

The tour guides relate to these students and help ease their stress as they transition to university. Students often question how the tour guide found their sense of community on campus or general advice on how to continue feeling a sense of Hispanic culture in such a multicultural environment.

How Spanish-language guides prepare for success

Spanish and English tours are nearly identical, with the noticeable difference of being in separate languages. With over 30 dialects of Spanish worldwide, to minimize confusion, Charlotte Spanish translator tour guides speak formal Spanish, primarily using words that are common across all dialects of the language.

The training process that Spanish tour guides must undergo is straightforward. It begins with applying to be a regular tour guide in English and then completing the tour guide training.

This training includes learning about all the main buildings on campus, fun facts on UNC Charlotte and methods to keep tour groups organized and engaged. Tour guides must additionally pass a ‘tour-101’ test with a team leader before meeting with the program manager.

Another critical skill for Spanish tour guides is connecting with the families on a level beyond just speaking the same language. The guides will often recommend some local stores, restaurants, bakeries and supermarkets that some families may be familiar with. Being able to find that comfort in knowing that you have the same resources you grew up with is important for students entering a brand new environment.

Additionally, the tour guides highlight cultural events taking place on campus, such as the international festival or major student organizations like the Latin American Student Organization (LASO), which helps show incoming students that there is a community or club for them at UNC Charlotte.

As the Charlotte community continues to grow, the diversity within the student body is even more evident.

By demonstrating Hispanic/Latino culture on campus and making Hispanic/Latino families feel welcome, the tour guides help create a more inclusive environment at UNC Charlotte.

“I feel really lucky to help other people who are currently in the same boat as I was before,” Saenz said.

‘College is always an option’: Hispanic College Awareness Program empowers Charlotte’s minority students

Emily Schenkel | Staff Writer

The Hispanic College Awareness Program (HCAP) provides essential information to minority and Hispanic students about the college application process and how to manage college finances.

HCAP headstarts college

One of HCAP’s largest events is Sábado de Padres, where HCAP members visit a local high school to hold a workshop for middle school students, high school students and their parents about the college application process.

This workshop emphasizes that college is always an option and explains how to make it work financially with scholarships, loans and FAFSA. Provided in both English and Spanish, students can receive the help they need at any level of proficiency.

Evelyn Gonzalez, a third-year student and president of HCAP, highlighted the environment of their workshops.

“At these workshops, I see parents who are very encouraging, open to learning and asking many questions. They would ask about our personal college journeys, how loans work for us and how FAFSA works for us. I just see a lot of parents who are very eager to help their child, which is very heartwarming and special as someone helping to lead the workshop,” Gonzalez said.

Empowering minority students

HCAP is vital for students at Charlotte, Gonzalez emphasizes, especially for those navigating the college application process or considering higher education.

“In a place as diverse as UNC Charlotte, minorities are still overlooked. Being in such a culturally diverse place in North Carolina makes helping kids who sort of lost hope of going to college, a really big deal,” Gonzalez said. “Seeing somebody like you actively going to college is very encouraging, so I think being active on campus and cultivating a group of people to help these kids is important.”

Coming to a melting pot of a city like Charlotte as a minority can be an interesting experience. Gonzalez has found a second home in HCAP, despite the chaos surrounding her.

“I was one of like six people of color at my high school, so coming to Charlotte for me was a huge culture shock. Having safe spaces like this on campus was crazy at first because I never had that,” Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez emphasizes that HCAP members are determined to create their futures and build a strong foundation through the community HCAP has provided, along with invaluable resources that have helped each student continue to succeed in college.

“Some people who go to college see it as a chore or job, but the people at our events are excited to be there and are excited to build a better life for themselves and their families,” Gonzalez said. “Seeing the passion these students have is incredible, especially since a lot of them are first-generation students, who did not come from a place of education or money.”

Networking with Hispanic professionals

In addition to events like Sábado de Padres, HCAP also hosts on-campus workshops for Charlotte students. Past workshops have included learning how to present yourself to potential employers, developing public speaking skills, learning how to submit a strong scholarship application and hearing from industry professionals.

Gonzalez spoke on a specific workshop from the past where HCAP members heard from Hispanics in the workforce.

“Last year, we had an event where we had Hispanics in the workforce come on campus and talk to us about how it is difficult to be a minority in a predominantly white space. We were able to network with them and make strong connections,” Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez believes that the social aspect of HCAP is a reason that members continue to show up to help.

“Having the desire to help is definitely what helps bring people in, but I think what helps people stay is just building that community and feeling comfortable,” Gonzalez said.



Courtesy of HCAP

His mom took away his Xbox. Then, Ogunjobi turned it into an NFL career

Courtesy of UNC Charlotte & Griffin Zetterburg Larry



Kelli Blackburn | Sports Editor

The crowd applauded in the dimly lit Popp-Martin Student Union ballroom as Olumide Larry Ogunjobi crossed the stage. Kanye West's "God Is" played over the audience as he made his way to the podium for his Hall of Fame induction speech. His medal lay around his neck, and Ogunjobi looked out at the crowd as his speech echoed through the room.

"I started football in a very unique way," Ogunjobi said. "I was 350 pounds: obese, [and] the only reason I started playing football was because my mom took my Xbox."

Fifteen years ago, when he entered his sophomore year at Ragsdale High School, Ogunjobi resisted his parents' push for him to play football. However, after some tough love and a frank conversation, he finally agreed—a pivotal decision that would change the trajectory of his life.

The making of a new man

Ogunjobi, originally from Livingston, N.J., moved to Jamestown, N.C., with his parents, both Yoruban immigrants from Nigeria.

His parents, Larry and Mercy, hired a coach, Robert Mitchell, who took Ogunjobi for a car ride one day. He pulled into Ragsdale, and Ogunjobi said, "What are we doing here?" Mitchell turned to him and declared to him, "You're going to play football." He didn't want to do it. But Mitchell got the permission slip, and Ogunjobi's mom signed it. That Saturday, he was out on the field.

Early in summer workouts, Ogunjobi struggled. Although he had gotten down to 330 pounds, he couldn't even get into a football stance. He was disinclined to work through practices and was not a happy camper at all.

When coaches asked if he was holding up, even though he couldn't finish his workout, he replied, "Yeah, I'm still here. Only because I had to be, though." After an eye roll directed toward the coaching staff, Coach Lewis Walker made it a mission to craft Ogunjobi into the player he believed he could become. After Walker's response, he never rolled his eyes again.

An early switch from the offensive to the defensive line was dizzying to Ogunjobi, who was still new to the sport. "Man, where am I going?" Ogunjobi explained. "Coach Walker took me under his wing and really gave me the tools I needed to be a really good football player."

Coach Walker and the high school football program quickly shifted Ogunjobi's perspective on the game.

"[Lewis] Walker is the first man other than my father to challenge me in ways I've never been challenged before," Ogunjobi shouted him out in his induction speech. "Coach Walker, you've been such a blessing. He and Coach [Johnny] Boykin really instilled in me what it meant to be a man."

He landed a spot on the defensive line and exploded in his junior and senior seasons. At Rags-

dale, Ogunjobi earned several honors after recording double-digit sacks and nearly 60 tackles.

By the time his college recruitment process began, Ogunjobi was a two-star prospect expected to land in an FCS program. His mom wanted him in medical school at Furman University to focus more on his education, but he waited patiently for offers and other considerations to flow through.

Similarly, when Charlotte's coaches assembled the inaugural football roster, they recognized Ogunjobi's potential and couldn't pass up the opportunity. Both Ogunjobi and the coaches took a chance on each other in the program's first year.

As a result, Ogunjobi became the first of many 'firsts' in the 49ers' young football history.

Building a legacy

Ogunjobi started as a redshirt for the 49ers in 2012, while the school was building its roster and developing players, even though they didn't play games until 2013. Although the team was not eligible for postseason play in its first two years due to NCAA rules, that didn't stop Charlotte from building something bigger.

He played all four years as a defensive lineman from 2013 to 2016, and checked off his first achievement in Charlotte's inaugural game: wearing the honorary No. 49 jersey in the game against Campbell University.

"That first game against Campbell [was prob-

ably my favorite memory], you know—packed out stadium, [and] just a lot of firsts in the game," Ogunjobi said. "Finally being able to play football against somebody other than yourself was awesome."

In Charlotte's inaugural season, Ogunjobi started all 11 games, recording a team-high 11.5 tackles for loss and five sacks.

Another first added to the book, Ogunjobi was the first 49er to record 10 TFLs in a season. Additionally, he had 48 tackles and a team-best 10 quarterback hurries.

Ogunjobi piled up tackles and sacks on Saturdays, collecting conference honors from the field, and earned a spot on the Conference USA Commissioner's Honor Roll all four years—all while also being recognized on the Athletic Director's List from 2013-2015 for having a 3.0 or higher GPA.

Off the field, he double-majored in computer science and biology, and through his studies, Bojan Cukic, dean of the College of Computing and Informatics, took an interest in him.

"I know we're R1 now, but computer science when I was there was still very rough, and Dr. Bojan took tremendous care of me," Ogunjobi pointed out in his Hall of Fame speech.

Nine years after Ogunjobi graduated, Dr. Bojan was invited to be Ogunjobi's plus-one to the induction ceremony.

Ogunjobi concluded his collegiate play as

Charlotte's all-time leader in tackles, sacks and QB hurries.

Once the postseason hit and draft buzz began, Ogunjobi was the first 49er to participate in the Senior Bowl and NFL Combine.

Ranked the No. 15 best defensive tackle in the draft, he was projected to be a fifth or sixth-round pick. Ogunjobi stayed home to potentially celebrate the lifelong accomplishment with his family.

In the third round, Ogunjobi's phone lit up. He answered, and on April 28, 2017, the Charlotte lineman heard the words every player dreams of: he was going to the NFL.

"With the 65th pick in the 2017 NFL Draft, the Cleveland Browns select Larry Ogunjobi—defensive tackle, Charlotte," Josh Cribbs, Cleveland Browns wide receiver and 2011 Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year, announced.

The friends and family of Ogunjobi exploded into cheers. His parents jumped up from their chairs, clapping excitedly as he slipped on a Browns hat. He smiled while quietly wiping tears as he hugged his parents—once a 350-pound teenager who spent hours on Xbox, he soaked in the moment.

Today, he is still the highest drafted Charlotte football player in program history.

Life in the league

The last nine years of Ogunjobi's NFL career have been a whirlwind. His rookie season was anything but ordinary, but he made the best of what he had.

A rocky season had the Browns finish with a 0-16 record—a dagger that fans tried to make light of by celebrating with a parade right outside the stadium.

"That's kind of rough for any rookie to experience," Ogunjobi chuckled. "It definitely built character. It made me analyze a lot of different things in my life, and it made it that much sweeter when we did turn the organization around."

He stayed with the Browns from 2017 to 2020, and in his final year with Cleveland, he helped the team to an 11-5 overall record, leading to a Wild Card appearance against the Pittsburgh Steelers. Cleveland won 48-37, marking their first and only playoff win since the 1994 season.

As a free agent in 2021, Ogunjobi stayed in the AFC North, landing with the Cincinnati Bengals. He set career numbers, with 7.0 sacks, 12 TFL and 16 QB hits.

Ogunjobi started 17 games, and the team made it to Super Bowl LVI. He became the first Charlotte player to reach a Super Bowl.

He was injured in the Bengals' first playoff game of the 2021 season against the Las Vegas Raiders and was unable to play in the Super Bowl.

"All season my narrative has been about 'Taking Control' of your life, of your circumstances, and most importantly of your story," Ogunjobi wrote on Twitter/X after his injury. "So what better opportunity than now to put it into practice? A path deferred is not a path denied! God doesn't make mistakes. This is just another part

of the journey, and we all know that the journey is what makes the destination worthwhile. I appreciate all the love, prayers, and support! Small thing to a giant! Jobi Out."

Ogunjobi exited Cincinnati once his contract was up, and most recently suited up for the Pittsburgh Steelers, spending the 2022 through 2024 seasons in the 'Burgh.

There, he joined another Charlotte football alum, linebacker Alex Highsmith, who played with the 49ers from 2016 to 2019.

"It was awesome having Larry here," Highsmith reminisced. When Highsmith found out Ogunjobi was making his way to the Steel City, he immediately called him, chopping it up and ready to make a splash.

In Pittsburgh, Ogunjobi appeared in 48 games, recording a total of 132 tackles, six sacks and one forced fumble. He was also chosen as the Steelers nominee for the 2024 Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year Award.

The Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year Award is the league's most prestigious honor, recognizing a current player for their excellence and their commitment to helping the greater community—something Ogunjobi strives for through his First of Many Foundation.

He dedicated his platform to hosting community events, including Christmas giveaways, where he takes kids shopping, and backpack giveaways, to help children living in urban communities.

"As an NFL player, we have an extremely large platform and because of that platform, it's important for us to be able to give back

and take off the helmet and show people that we are human as well," Ogunjobi said. "Being somebody who loves kids and seeing how transformative those years [are] when you're kids, how important that guidance and mentorship and being able to be that for them is super important."

Ogunjobi hopes to continue his efforts by doing things in the community, including etiquette classes and mentorship, to continue to give back and make an impact.

After the season, free agency hit again, which led to his new beginning with the Buffalo Bills, where he signed on March 12, 2025.

Back to the beginnings

Back in Charlotte, prior to his 2025 debut, Ogunjobi stood on stage for Charlotte Athletics, showing his appreciation for the University that allowed him to grow into the man and player he is today.

The man of many firsts, Ogunjobi, still has new things to try, new records to break and new places to see—all of which might not have been possible if he were the same high school boy wanting to play his Xbox just one more time.

"[Being a 49er]—it's everything," Ogun-

jobi said after his induction. "It's propelled my career in the NFL, coming from small beginnings and being where I'm at today, it's nothing but a testament to the Lord and an amazing program that I've been a part of."

From the teenager who once resisted football to a ninth-year NFL veteran, Ogunjobi's story embodies the message he now shares with Charlotte students: when you trust the process and keep knocking, the door opens.

"Your dreams are valid," Ogunjobi said. "You wouldn't have the idea in your heart if you didn't have the tools to make it happen. If you work hard, give your all day in and day out and refuse to quit—when you're knocking on the door of life, eventually, it's going to open."

And maybe then, someone else will walk through and become the first of many in their own path.



Courtesy of Charlotte Sports Information & Charlotte Athletics

Elevating Charlotte volleyball: A Q&A with first-year Head Coach Benavia Jenkins

Ben Norinowski | Staff Writer

The Charlotte women's volleyball team needed a new direction in 2024, following the dismissal of Head Coach Karen Weatherington midway through the season and a last-place finish in the American Conference. That new direction led to the arrival of Head Coach Benavia Jenkins in December.

Before joining the 49ers, Jenkins had an illustrious playing career that included five straight conference championships.

Coach Jenkins has created an equally impressive coaching career. After stints at Lincoln Park Academy, Santa Fe College and Coastal Carolina, she was an assistant coach at the University of South Florida, then head coach at East Tennessee State University (ETSU).

At ETSU, she earned Southern Conference Coach of the Year honors following an impressive 21-8 season, and most recently became an assistant coach with the University of Michigan before her new chapter with Charlotte.

NT: You played at the University of Florida and professionally in Spain, Turkey, Austria and Switzerland. How have those playing experiences influenced your coaching philosophy today?

My experiences at Florida as a player, I was still in that mindset as I was learning and growing. Then when I had to transition going overseas, you have to know the game, and you're learning a game at a different pace, at a much higher level with some of the best people in the nation. One thing that I started doing is I had this little book that I started. All the best drills that I learned that I felt like I was getting better with... [and] also I put in my book some posi-

tive things that I saw that coaches did. I put that into my black book as well and say, "Hey, this is the positive that I want to contain moving forward when I become a coach, and these are the things that I don't want to take with me."

NT: What led you to decide to become a coach after your playing career? Did you have any coaches or mentors who inspired you with this decision?

I was in Switzerland, and I just remember walking up to my coach and I said to him, "This is it for me. I'm ready to retire. My body is getting tired, my mind is getting tired. I'm tired of getting yelled at in practice. I'm just tired." And he said, "OK," he's like, "What's next?" I said, "For the rest of the season, I want to learn under you. I want you to show me [the] numbers. I want you to teach me about drills. I want to learn from you in this moment." So, that's what we did. My biggest thing was, how do I transition my mind from being a player into a coach?" [And] I would have to say Mary Wise—my collegiate coach—she's done so much. I watched her as I played for her throughout my career, raising kids, and here I am raising a child, and how she was able to still be successful with games, balance her family and balance us as a team. She has always been a big role model in my life, so I emulate a lot from her.

NT: Coming from Michigan's coaching staff, what were some of your biggest takeaways, and how are you incorporating those lessons now?

You want to continue to grow. I got a chance to work with Erin

Virtue, and she was the assistant coach for our Women's USA National Team, so, being able to work under her, she taught me a lot about how to run systems better, how to be a lot more in control of your emotions in tough moments and how to allow your team to sit in the moment. She helped pull a little bit more knowledge that I had in me. Working with her showed me a lot of who I am and how much more I will continue to grow in this sport and continue to help my coaches grow in this sport.

NT: What was the main factor that convinced you to coach at Charlotte?

[Athletic Director] Mike Hill is a big reason, to be honest, why I took this job. He worked under Mary Wise when he was at Florida, and he understood how volleyball teams and programs should be run, and you want to work with the AD [athletic director] who wants to see a sport grow. If they didn't care about Charlotte volleyball, this wouldn't be the place that I would be [at]. But they care, they want to see us grow, and we're having people that want to donate more to this program and see us be successful in the next couple of years. Coming into the South and being closer to family was very important. They were a big reason why I moved here, too.

NT: Who on the team has really impressed you this season? Are there any younger players that stand out to you?

Kristen Birmingham, we call her KB—a very elite player [who] just plays at a high level. Jessica Ricks is starting to come out of her shell,

talking more and [showing] more personality, a lot less errors than she had last year. So, she's learning and she's growing in a game—she's going to be fun to watch. Annika Thompson—she was the Defensive Player of the Week, but she's been doing that at practice. We've been pushing her in practice, and what I liked the most about her is you can keep pushing [her]. You push, [and] she'll push back sometimes, but she can make those adjustments and she makes us better. I think all my girls, they do some impressive things...I think these girls are going to be fun to watch.

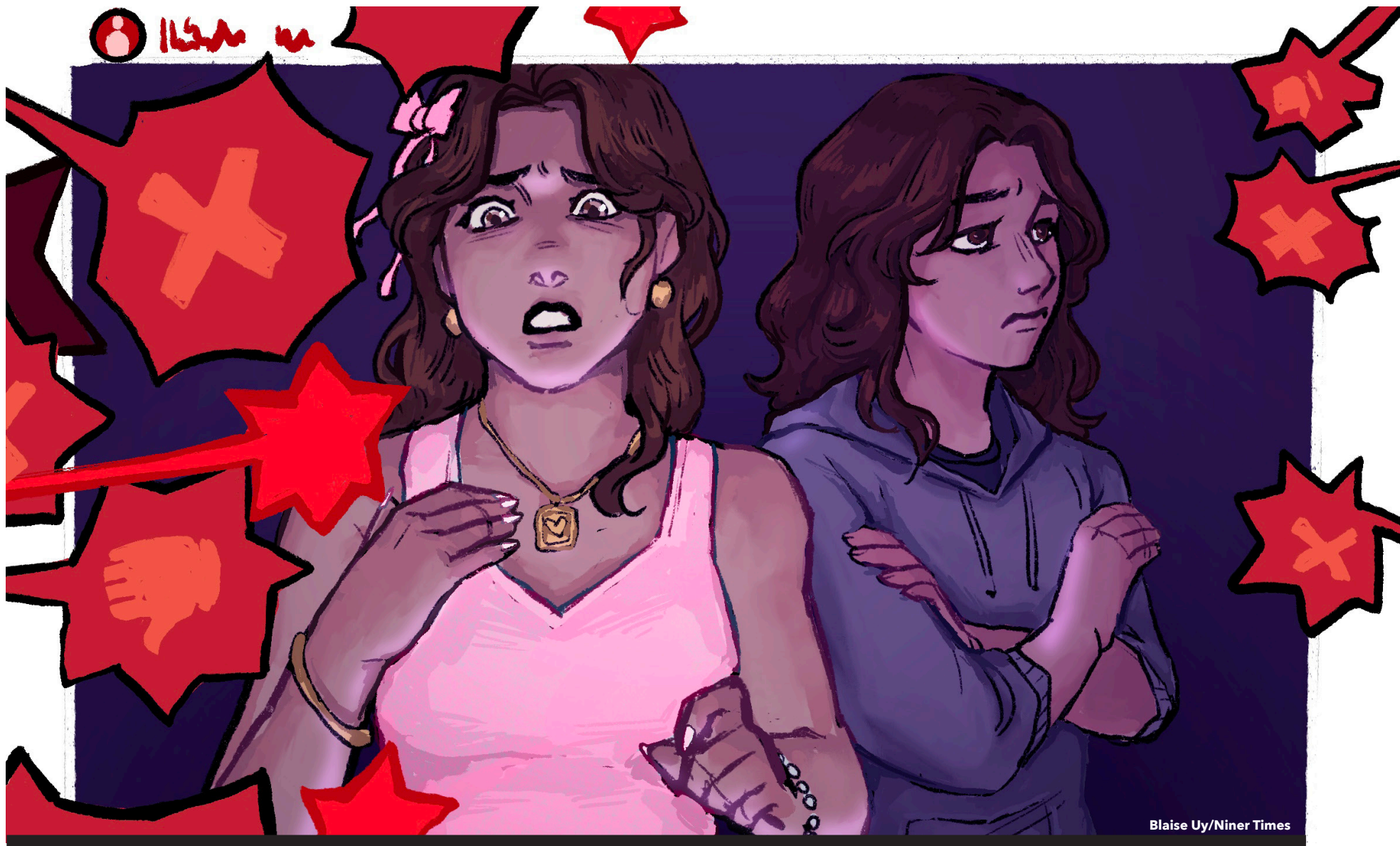
NT: Is there a certain saying or mantra you have for the team?

I say, "0-0" a lot to them. I also say let's just go have fun, play volleyball. This team can't play tight because as soon as we play tight, we make the most errors. We have to be loose—loose for our team shows confidence. Tightness on our team shows we're already defeated.

NT: How do you define success—for the team as a whole and for individual players?

I think it's the little things, to be honest. We're already seeing little successes in practice, [like] the hitting efficiency that we're attacking at right now with our pin hitters. I think KB is top in the nation with hitting efficiency...those are little steps. We have to be grateful at those moments regardless of who we're playing because we're doing some really good things...I just think it's just the little things that define success for us.





Blaise Uy/Niner Times

Opinion: We need to give women a break

Delaney Crowder | Contributor

In today's modern society, a woman is judged from her birth to her dying day. From what she wears to what she eats or how she behaves, navigating today's world as a woman often feels like walking on eggshells made of other people's opinions. But does this have to be true? How would the world be different if we chose to let women live their lives and just be?

When a woman looks in the mirror while she styles her hair, tries on a new outfit or does her makeup, she often finds things about herself she hates before things she loves. A recent study conducted by the National Organization for Women found that by the age of 13, 53% of American girls are "unhappy with their bodies," and this grows to 78% by the age of 17.

The unfortunate reality is that more girls hate their bodies than love them. But is this because of women's own views of how they should look,

or what society wants them to look like?

The judgment does not end at appearance. Women often find themselves criticized based on the music they listen to, the books they read or the movies they watch. Even if they consume more 'masculine' associated media, women can be accused of faking their taste or being a 'pick me' girl so that guys will like them. No matter what form of media a woman chooses to indulge in, they will be judged for it.

If a woman chooses not to have kids, she is being selfish, but if she does, she is sacrificing her future and becoming a boring housewife. If a woman gets married, she is sacrificing her autonomy, but if she stays single, there is something clearly wrong with her.

If a woman chooses to have kids, she will be judged whether she risks her career to stay at home with them or if she sends them to daycare.

Whether a woman chooses to have children or not, if she chooses to marry or stay single, if she stays at home or pursues a career, she will get ridiculed for doing one or the other.

In 2023, the hit movie "Barbie," directed by Greta Gerwig, was released in theaters. After many years of avoiding theaters due to a pandemic scaring us away from public spaces, people flocked to see this hit feminist movie. The movie grossed a whopping \$1.4 billion worldwide and over \$630 million domestically.

This movie was not just a toy commercial for Barbie dolls; it was a powerful story of realizing that women are enough without giving in to societal expectations. In a heartfelt monologue delivered by America Ferrera's character, Gloria, she explored all of the unfair judgments and expectations delivered onto women. This was a wake-up call to so many women about how unfair our

lives are under the criticism of the patriarchy.

So many women find themselves in this never-ending, 'give-a-mouse-a-cookie'-esque situation that always ends with the same judgmental glass of milk being handed out at the end. We are exhausted from being judged day after day for simply existing in the world. Too often, women have to imagine instead of living in a reality where they can exist without fear of criticism. What would it be like to live in a world like that? Could we ever make Barbie Land a reality?

Whether a society free of judgment of women is possible or not, we should aspire towards a future where that is possible. However, this reality is only possible if we strive to allow women to be themselves. Instead of a world filled with hatred, criticism or women walking on eggshells, we could live in a world where women are allowed to look, enjoy or be whatever they want.

Column: “The Summer I Turned Pretty” ...profitable?

Crawford Anderson | Contributor

“The Summer I Turned Pretty” has been one of the most anticipated shows of the summer, with weekly drops during the final season sparking debates everywhere from dorm door whiteboards to the far reaches of the internet. For Wilmington, N.C.—better known to fans as Cousins Beach—the sets, crews and ripple effects of Amazon Prime Video’s breakout romance drama have been unfolding in real time.

Despite the fierce debate between Team Conrad and Team Jeremiah (Conrad, duh), there’s no debate that “The Summer I Turned Pretty” has been a massive boost for Wilmington’s local economy.

According to a Wilmington Business Journal report from February 2025, more than \$300 million was spent directly by streaming services and film producers in North Carolina last year.

A large share of that money flowed into Wilmington to produce the next wave of hit shows and films. That is a deep impact on a region with a population of just over 450,000, many of whom are students and retirees, where a single production can feel like a tidal wave of money and opportunity washing over a small-town economy. Altogether, productions like “The Summer I Turned Pretty” create and

maintain thousands of local jobs each season.

And while Lola Tung, the actress who plays Isabel ‘Belly’ Conklin, is flown into Wilmington to live out her love triangle fantasies, about 150 full-time crew members who live in and around Wilmington are employed to support the main cast. On top of that, the Wilmington Regional Film Commission estimates that more than 1,600 short-term jobs—extras, support staff, background partygoers and last-minute wedding attendees—are created during filming.

Wilmington is not called “Wilmywood” for nothing. With about 1,200 active film industry employees, it has the largest pool of supporting actors and crew on the East Coast outside Atlanta.

That depth of talent is exactly why productions like “The Summer I Turned Pretty,” Prime Video’s “The Runarounds” and Netflix’s “The Waterfront” keep rolling in, and why Wilmington remains the go-to destination for production giants looking to stretch their budgets without sacrificing quality.

While studios spent hundreds of millions just last year, the downstream effects are even larger. Thousands of employees eat at local Wilmington restaurants, send their kids to local schools and pay into the tax base that funds emer-

gency services and roadway repairs, creating ripple effects that power the local economy. Even years after shows have wrapped, superfans flocking to famous sets keep money flowing into local attractions and eateries. Just ask the diehards still visiting the backdrops of “One Tree Hill” or “Dawson’s Creek.”

Finally, local carpenters, electricians, caterers and drivers are hired on temporary contracts, boosting hundreds more jobs and small businesses that could not survive without the deep pockets of Amazon, Netflix and other major studios. These transactions turn a temporary shoot into a lifeline for small businesses.

From coffee shops slammed with crew orders to local equipment rental shops cashing checks, the money keeps Wilmington’s economy humming long after the cameras leave.

And while the most popular romance of the summer may be over, Wilmington’s receipts will outlast the love triangle. Amazon may have left with its finale, but the cash it pumped into North Carolina is still circulating through hotels, shops and paychecks. Fans can debate the ending all they want, but North Carolina’s economy already got its happily ever after.

Crawford Anderson/Niner Times

Niner’s Comics: Stadium expansion

Catherine Kerns | Staff Illustrator

