

NINERTIMES
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Feb. 12, 2025

History

Women's lacrosse
trailblaze their
first ever season



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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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Emmanuel Perkins/Niner Times

Upcoming events to watch for on campus

Demo Kitchen: Chef Glenn
Valentine's Day Rose Apple Tarts
Feb. 13, 12-1 P.M., UREC Demo
Kitchen

Niner Esports Union LAN Party
Feb. 15, 11 A.M.-8 P.M.,
Popp-Martin Student Union 340

Cheer Nation and Student Orgs
Spirit Rally
Feb. 18, 4:30-6:30 P.M., Halton
Arena

2025 Levine Scholars Gallery
Feb. 13, 5-7 P.M., Popp-Martin
Student Union Art Gallery

Men's Basketball vs. ECU
Feb. 15, 4 P.M., Halton Arena

Grad Student Potluck and
International Trivia Night
Feb. 19, 4:30-6:30 P.M.,
Atkins Library 146

NOTES FROM THE NEWSROOM:

Everyone watches women's sports—it's time you do, too

Kelli Blackburn | Sports Editor



The rise of women's sports has captured the nation's attention—and now is the time to join the movement. The popularity of women's sports rose during the 2023 March Madness Final Four as Caitlin Clark dominated against the University of South Carolina. Her stellar performance not only made history but also marked a turning point for women's sports, proving their point to captivate and inspire the grandest stages.

But, it is not just Clark's efforts that have contributed to the growth of recognition for women's athletics across the nation. It is happening here at Charlotte, too, where our teams are gaining traction in their own right.

As we head into another spring season of Charlotte Athletics, I encourage you to focus on women's sports and maintain it. Charlotte women's lacrosse is a lively team ready to make a name for themselves.

Their success is something that everyone should be ready to watch for in their inaugural season.

It is not just them, either, but our softball and track and field athletes are determined to come out swinging for the fences as well. These athletes dedicate countless hours to their passion and sport. The least we can do is show up and support. This season, be a part of the momentum—because our women 49ers are putting on a show you will not want to miss.





WHAT IS THE UNC SYSTEM?

The University of North Carolina (UNC) System is a public university system that includes 17 institutions, including UNC Charlotte.

The UNC System is governed by the Board of Governors (BoG). They are responsible for the overall planning and governance of the UNC System and its institutions. Policies set by the BoG must be followed by all its institutions.

Peter Hans is the current president of the UNC System, and has served in this role since summer 2020.

HOW IS UNC CHARLOTTE AFFECTED BY THE DEI COURSE MEMO?

It is still unclear how exactly UNC Charlotte's courses are affected.

26 general education courses falling under the "Local Intersections and Engagement Theme" of the 2024-2025 course catalog will likely be the most affected.

Some of these courses include:

- SOCY 1511: Sociological Approaches to Local Issues
- SOWK 1511: The Field of Social Work
- SPAN 1512: US Hispanic, Latina/o/x Topics
- WGST 1512: Introduction to Gender Studies in the U.S.
- WGST 1512: Introduction to Gender Studies in the U.S.

Programs and major-specific courses should not be affected if the course is "substantially related to its specific major."

Chancellor Sharon L. Gaber must submit a written waiver to the BoG for major-specific course exemptions by their next meeting on Feb. 12.

Davis Cuffe, Sofia DiStefano & Clare Grealey | Editor-in-Chief, News Editor & Copy Editor

Editor's Note: This article was last updated for print on Feb. 9. The most current reporting and updates are on ninertimes.com.

In compliance with a new UNC System Board of Governors memorandum, public North Carolina universities must remove all course credit requirements related to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI).

Universities not in compliance with this order risk losing out on federal funding, as warned by UNC System Senior Vice President for Legal Affairs & General Counsel Andrew Tripp, who sent the memo to the UNC System's 17 chancellors on Feb. 5.

According to Tripp's memo, UNC System universities, including UNC Charlotte, received \$1.4 billion in federal funding for research in the 2023-2024 fiscal year, which was 62% of all research funds.

For North Carolina universities, changes in compliance with the memo may not be immediate.

A statement from UNC Charlotte revealed the school will need further time to make any changes.

"We have received the memo and are reviewing it. However, it would be premature for us to comment further until we have had adequate time to complete our assessment," wrote the University to the Niner Times.

UNC Asheville Chancellor Kimberly van Noort released a statement to students and staff on Feb. 6, confirming that the university would comply with the directive. Van Noort wrote that the university would be "immediately suspending existing graduation requirements related to diversity intensive courses."

She also affirmed to students that they would be able to finish all course work of the spring 2025 semester that are affected by the memo, or could withdraw without penalty.

Other UNC System institutions are currently in the process of reviewing the memo before proceeding with any action.

According to a UNC system spokesperson, the memo will not affect course material or work but will suspend DEI-focused courses that

students are required to take to graduate.

Tripp's memo results from President Donald Trump's Jan. 21 executive order titled "Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring to Merit-Based Opportunities," which eliminated previous executive orders promoting DEI programs and policies.

In his memo, Tripp ordered all UNC System universities to comply and suspend courses related to DEI.

"All general education requirements and major-specific requirements mandating completion of course credits related to diversity, equity and inclusion, or any other topic identified in Section VII of the Equality Policy are suspended," wrote Tripp.

Tripp wrote in the memo that students currently enrolled in spring 2025 now-suspended courses may choose to stay or drop out. Whether they decide to stay in the course or not, these suspended courses will be converted into a general education requirement.

The suspension of the courses will not affect or delay graduation unless students fail to reach the required credit hours.

"During the suspension, provosts will work using existing curricular and program development processes to implement long-term solutions for complying with the Jan. 21 EO [executive order], with the understanding that the chancellor serves as the final decision-maker upon advice received from these processes," continued Tripp in the memo.

According to the memo, the chancellor at each university can approve a written waiver for the suspended major requirements, but they can not approve a waiver for the new general education requirements. This means chancellors can still require DEI courses for major-specific requirements but not for general education requirements at their own discretion.

Pending approval, the chancellor must submit all waivers to the Board of Governors Committee on Educational Planning, Policies and Programming at their next meeting on Feb. 12.

"Today's action makes certain that the University can continue to certify its compliance with federal anti-discrimination laws without concern that the now-suspended curricular and program requirements may violate the Jan. 21

EO or any subsequent directives from the federal executive branch on this topic," wrote Tripp.

Other presidential executive orders have also had an impact on the University, prompting a Jan. 29 email from Chancellor Sharon L. Gaber, reassuring students of the University's commitment to students.

"While policies and directives may evolve, we remain committed to creating a welcoming and safe campus community, ensuring student success, undertaking impactful research and making meaningful contributions to our region and beyond," wrote Gaber.

Within the UNC System, these changes come after a May 2024 Board of Governors meeting that introduced firm guidelines on institutional neutrality, effectively dismantling DEI programming.

Tripp presented the initial policy on April 17, 2024, and the motion to move to a full board vote passed unanimously with no discussion.

An Aug. 8, 2024 email from Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Jennifer Troyer and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Kevin W. Bailey detailed the changes that would be made to Charlotte's campus.

The email also confirmed that Charlotte, like other universities in the system, would comply with the new policy.

As a result, the offices of Diversity, Inclusion, Identity Equity and Engagement, as well as the Office of Academic Diversity and Inclusion were all closed. Some programs under these offices were closed, while others, such as the Students Achieving First-Year Excellence (SAFE) program, were moved to reside under a different office.

Similarly, employees of the University were reassigned to other positions from their previous employment in DEI-adjacent offices, such as Brandon Wolfe, the former associate vice chancellor for diversity and inclusion. Wolfe is now the executive director of campus and alumni group connections.

With the reporting on this memorandum and its possible effects still new, further details are expected to emerge as universities take special measures to comply.

Alumna Hannah Javidi named in Forbes' 30 Under 30 for her work in adolescent sexual health education

Angelina Manoj | Staff Writer

Hannah Javidi, a UNC Charlotte alumna, never imagined she would one day be recognized on Forbes' 30 Under 30 list for notable healthcare achievements.

Now, the postdoctoral research fellow has made a new name for herself and her research on adolescent sexual health education.

Javidi is a postdoctoral research fellow at Indiana University School of Public Health, where she works in the Department of Health Science. She dedicates her career to adolescent sexual health education, particularly in consent and communication, a passion she first developed during her Ph.D. program.

Javidi said she was pleasantly surprised by the recognition.

"I was hopeful, but you just never know. I knew I was under consideration," said Javidi. "But I wasn't expecting anything, so it was a really wonderful surprise."

Her work is far from surprising. Javidi's digital program, Promoting Assertive Communication Among Teens (PACT), has already impacted hundreds of adolescents by filling the gaps in traditional sex education.

Javidi's journey began at UNC Charlotte, where she earned a bachelor's degree in psychology before pursuing a Ph.D. at NC State.

She gained her first hands-on research experience as an undergraduate in Dr. Linda Shanock's lab, which focused on Industrial-Organizational (IO) Psychology. Though IO was not her ultimate path, the experience deepened her love for psychology.

"I loved her [Shanock] both as a human and as a successful researcher," said Javidi. "And that helped me fall in love with being more hands-on in the field, conducting studies and doing applied work."

Despite her growing passion, Javidi admitted that when it came time to apply for graduate school, she was not entirely sure which direction to take.

"I did not actually know quite what I wanted to do when I applied to grad school," said Javidi. "I knew that I loved helping people and seeing the direct impact of my work on people's lives and their health and well-being. I knew that I wanted to pursue graduate training in Applied Psychology or Community Psychology programs."

Her path took her to Dr. Laura Widman's Teen Health Lab at NC State, where she got into adolescent sexual health research.

"I fell in love with it really quickly," said Javidi. "We did a lot of community work in schools, where I got to interact with adolescents and see the impact sexual health programming was having. I learned that I really enjoyed that type of work, so I continued it throughout my Ph.D."

One of the biggest challenges Javidi identified

in her research was the lack of proper consent education for adolescents.

"Sex education historically has been really lacking, especially when it comes to sex-positive topics like consent," said Javidi. "Consent education is so important during adolescence, especially prior to college, which is a heightened risk period for sexual violence victimization. Teens aren't getting this information in schools or from their parents."

Determined to address this issue, Javidi came up with PACT, a 20-minute educational program designed to teach the fundamentals of affirmative consent and help teens understand sexual topics through videos and activities.

"PACT includes lots of different consent-related topics, like the process of checking in with a partner to make sure they're enjoying sexual activity and how to identify coercion," said Javidi. "It's half informational videos and half skill-based activities so that they can practice what they just learned."

For her dissertation, Javidi evaluated PACT in a randomized controlled trial with over 800 adolescents across the country in a national sample and found that it was generally likable.

Javidi explained how the program improved some of the adolescents' sexual cognitions in the short term.

"For example, it was improving their attitudes toward consent in the short term. That was encouraging and given that promise," said Javidi. "I knew that I wanted to do more with it."

During her postdoctoral fellowship, she refined and expanded the program. PACT, which initially stood for "Promoting Assertive Consent Among Teens," evolved into "Promoting Assertive Communication Among Teens" to encompass a broader range of topics.

"Now, PACT is not only a sexual consent program but is more broadly about sexual assertiveness, which also includes condom negotiation, sort of a similar but equally important skill that's also undertaught to adolescents," said Javidi.

"The second aim for this is really focusing in on a more specialized group, adolescent sexual minority males, or queer teen guys."

Javidi expanded PACT to address additional topics like condom negotiation, particularly for adolescent sexual minority males. Her work is funded by an National Institute of Health (NIH) Pathway to Independence Award (K99 ROO), allowing her to tailor the program to communities such as LGBTQ+ youth.

Like many other researchers, Javidi faced hurdles, particularly with data collection. One major challenge has been filtering out fraudulent responses in online surveys. To combat this, she works directly with LGBTQ+ community centers for in-person recruitment.



"It's not only more rewarding, but it also ensures we're getting data from real teenagers," said Javidi. "Who will actually benefit from the program?"

Javidi's work and research have already influenced programs in North Carolina. In her Ph.D. lab, working under Dr. Widman, she co-led an opioid misuse prevention initiative in rural middle schools, responding to the area's high rates of prescription drug use.

"The county that I went to was severely impacted by the opioid epidemic, and so teenagers there were experiencing high rates of heroin use and prescription drug abuse," said Javidi. "My

team went in and delivered this educational program called 'This is (Not) About Drugs.' We were able to evaluate the program's impact and saw positive changes in students' knowledge and beliefs about opioid use."

Javidi hopes to continue researching in the future while spreading her research to as many communities as possible.

"There's so much to be done. There are so many gaps to be filled in adolescent sexual communication education that there will always be ways to continue this work," said Javidi. "I hope to always be doing this kind of research in the future."

The leader behind Greek Life's success

MICHELLE GUOBADIA GUIDES CHARLOTTE FOR THE 17TH YEAR

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor

Overseeing UNC Charlotte's Greek Life is no easy task; doubling the size is even harder, and while Michelle Guobadia has excelled as Charlotte's director of Fraternity and Sorority Life, it is a role she did not originally intend on stepping into.

When Guobadia got the call to apply for UNC Charlotte's director of Fraternity and Sorority Life, she was serving her third year as the assistant director of Fraternity and Sorority Life at George Mason University. The assistant director role was her first job out of college, was a role she planned on staying in.

Guobadia explained that her former mentor, Shelly Brown Dobek, the director of Greek Life at North Carolina State University (NCSU), recommended her for the job at UNC Charlotte despite Guobadia's hesitation.

"I thought, 'No, I'm not ready to be a director,'" said Guobadia. "I'm the assistant director, and I like it here; [so] I kind of ignored him."

After constant efforts from Brown Dobek, with three phone calls urging Guobadia to apply for the job, Guobadia gave in, thinking that she would not get the job and that if she did, it would not be long-term.

"Fine, I'll apply, but I'm not going to get the job," said Guobadia. "I ended up getting the job. I came here, I interviewed. I told myself, 'I'll be here four years, maybe five years,' [and] yeah, this is year 17."

Before going to college, Guobadia had no desire to be involved in Greek Life or become a University program director. While in high school, she had mentally scratched off sorority life on her list until she got to college.

While attending the University of Delaware, she saw Greek Life in a different light, and joined the sisterhood of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. Now, in 2025, she is coming up on her 25th year as an active member of her sorority.

Dedicated is an understatement regarding Guobadia's involvement in Greek Life during her undergraduate years. Once she went Greek during her second year, she dove right into college life.

Guobadia was involved in student government, the campus allocation board and council and chapter president for her sorority, which led her to find a calling in leadership positions.

Charlotte looked much different when Guobadia stepped foot on campus. Buildings like the Popp-Martin Student Union, University Recreation Center and the Belk Plaza Fountain did not exist. Various Greek Life chapters were also not yet established in the Charlotte community.

Guobadia expressed her amazement at how much the University and Greek community have grown in the 17 years that she has been here.

"I literally blinked, and 16 years had gone by," said Guobadia. "There were 28 chapters here at UNC Charlotte, and there were [around] 896 Greeks, which was crazy. Today, we have 41 chapters and about 1,800 [Greek] students. I've literally watched the community grow, and I've watched this school grow."

While doubling the number of those in Greek Life as director at UNC Charlotte, Guobadia also became an expert in anti-hazing, a prominent and nationwide problem within the Greek community.

In her work in hazing prevention, she hopes to break down the misconceptions surrounding hazing and prove how hazing does not add to the lifelong bond that most Greek students hope to achieve.

Guobadia strongly believes in the core values of Greek Life, which focus on leadership, service and community. She highlighted that it does not matter what council a student is on; the goal is to propel students toward a greater understanding of what it means to be Greek.

Guobadia aims to be a guiding leadership figure and leave a more significant impact on her students.

She explained that she takes pride in being a guide to past students in a similar fashion to how she was nearly two decades ago, pushing them towards the same path of higher education.

UNC Charlotte alumni students of Guobadia have followed her lead and spread the wealth as administrators and leaders nationwide at different universities.

"There are 20 former students who do this work, and they're all over the country," said Guobadia. "The fact that they just went and got their master's degrees and they started in this space, and it was the skills that they learned in our office that propelled them to be amazing administrators and beyond, I am honored by that."

Not only has she paved the way for other students, but Guobadia has also made tremendous efforts in aiding the Black community in UNC Charlotte's Greek Life.

At a predominantly white institution, many Black students might not anticipate seeing a leadership figure who resembles them. However, Guobadia defied expectations when she arrived in Charlotte.

"National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) students have never seen the director or even people

in the office who look like them or who are from the same Council as them," said Guobadia.

"Our students here get that, and they've had that for 16 years. I don't look like a majority of our community, but anyone could do anything if you're passionate about it."

Striving to create a space for all in Greek Life, Guobadia emphasized the importance of creating a meaningful experience for students of all backgrounds.

"I want anyone on campus to see themselves in Greek Life, especially people who never thought they would be Greek because they thought it was only done one way," said Guobadia. "And I think for someone whose experience was like that, it's really important for me to show that as a director."

As Guobadia reflected on her whirlwind journey with UNC Charlotte, she expressed her gratification in the support and encouragement she received from the University.

"I've never felt unsupported, and I've never felt the school was anti-Greek or didn't want fraternity [and] sorority life here," said Guobadia. "UNC Charlotte is a great place to be Greek because we do it [differently,] and I think we do it better."



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Ivory Galloway/Niner Times

CUSA and DPhiL come together to ring in the Lunar New Year and celebrate the Year of the Snake

Madison Washington | Contributor

Ava Weaver & Kai Diaz/Niner Times



In a celebration of tradition and unity, UNC Charlotte's Chinese Undergraduate Student Association (CUSA) partnered with Delta Phi Lambda (DPhiL) to ring in the Lunar New Year.

Attendees welcomed the Year of the Snake at the Cone University Center on Feb. 4 with festivities, food and performances.

The event showcased a vibrant celebration of Chinese culture and various aspects of other East Asian cultures. The Lunar New Year, also known as the Spring Festival, is an annual 15-day celebration marking the beginning of the new year. It is the most significant holiday in China and the Chinese diaspora worldwide.

The Chinese lunar calendar follows a 12-year zodiac cycle, with each year represented by an animal symbolizing different traits and fortunes. This year marks the Year of the Snake.

The snake's association with the Lunar New Year symbolizes a year of personal growth; as the snake sheds its skin, it marks a powerful symbol of positive change and new beginnings.

Record painting, Chinese knots and a potluck were all offered at the event, alongside games such as Mahjong and a giveaway of several prizes. Together, CUSA and DPhiL hoped to bring a positive cultural experience where the Asian community of UNC Charlotte could come together.

Guests were greeted with a vibrant room filled with shades of red, white and yellow. The walls were adorned with red lanterns and white fairy lights, greeting guests as they came in.

Benjamin Yang, the president of CUSA, explained that the event was not just a means of celebration but a worthwhile opportunity to foster cultural awareness and

community.

"We want to spread cultural awareness and community among not just the Chinese American students at Charlotte," said Yang. "But to spread cultural awareness to everyone."

The Chinese Undergraduate Student Association and Delta Phi Lambda play important roles in fostering a sense of belonging, community and personal growth at UNC Charlotte.

CUSA encourages students to engage with Chinese culture and organizes events promoting cross-cultural exchange.

Delta Phi Lambda similarly creates a supportive space for Asian women to engage with their heritage and hone leadership skills.

Founded at the University of Georgia in 1998, DPhiL is an organization dedicated to following its mission of "improving our community through service, leadership and everlasting sisterhood."

Alongside CUSA, DPhiL hopes to promote sisterhood and community-building through the Lunar New Year event.

As the groups rang in the Lunar New Year with one of the biggest event turnouts in their organizations' history, members felt a newfound sense of transformation and influence within their community.

Vice president of CUSA, Ellie McCutchen, highlighted the importance of cultivating a strong bond that students can find to celebrate their Chinese culture.

"Creating a space for Chinese and Asian people or [those] who want to understand the Chinese language and culture to come together, hang out, eat some good food and connect," said McCutchen. "It is something that is important and also something that I treasure and value."



Courtesy of 100 Black Women

Charlotte's 100 Black Women chapter follows the mission of uplifting and supporting young Black women

Eve Goldman | Asst. News Editor

UNC Charlotte's 100 Black Women aims to embody their mission of fostering leadership development, cultural awareness, networking and a commitment to community service.

The National Coalition of 100 Black Women (NCBW), founded in October 1981, has long been a beacon of empowerment, advocacy and mentorship for Black women and young girls nationwide.

The Charlotte NCBW chapter currently contains 58 members and prides itself on being an organization that promotes not only the well-being but also the strength of young Black women.

Mi'Lisa Curtis, the UNC Charlotte chapter's vice president and a fourth-year transfer student from Michigan, spoke about how joining the organization connected her with like-minded individuals and offered opportunities beyond those confined to academic majors.

"I love that it is an organization that didn't group me based on my major," said Curtis. "I feel like a lot of organizations are like Black Women in Medicine or UPA, the Public Health Association. It's kind of like grouping you by your major, which is fine; it's great for networking, but I love that this organization groups women who genuinely are committed to community service, health and cultural awareness and professional development. I was able to connect with people and join and make genuine friendships."

The chapter seeks to broaden the understanding and appreciation of Black culture within the University's community. Through impactful programs and initiatives, the organization primarily promotes whole-body wellness, diversity awareness and professional development while continuing to uplift and inspire Black women and allies alike.

Curtis explained that the chapter aims to host as many events and fundraisers as possible to spread awareness in the campus community.

For Black History Month, the organization has planned various events open to the entire campus community. One of the following scheduled events is a table talk hosted alongside UNC Charlotte's Public Health Association and Campus Wellness Promotion.

"I love that this organization groups women who genuinely are committed to community service, health and cultural awareness and professional development."

- Mi'Lisa Curtis, vice president

Curtis explained that the event will focus on fostering healthy relationships, both platonic and romantic, while also creating an open environment to discuss mental health, a topic often stigmatized within the Black community.

"Especially within the Black community, I feel like we kind of don't talk about these things; as far as mental health [goes], [it is] kind of dissociated, we don't really talk about, and a lot of people don't go to therapy," said Curtis. "So it's something that we want to [be] a norm. Because it is normal."

Other Black History Month activities include a fun and educational Black History Jeopardy Night, which promises an engaging opportunity to learn about Black historical figures and events while competing for prizes.

"That's always super fun. I feel like I learned something new every time you have a Jeopardy night," said Curtis. "There's so much history to learn, so that's always a fun way to incorporate it and have a prize for the winner."

"We have health and cultural awareness; we have a professional development committee as well. They host events where we talk about LinkedIn and resume building," said Curtis. "Something big for us is what's business casual and what's business professional, and just learning the differences between them. For health and cultural awareness, we do UREC classes, which are about mind, body and soul."

The health and cultural awareness committee offers activities that promote wellness for the mind, body and soul. Plans for future events include cooking demonstration classes and health-focused workshops.

The professional development committee organizes sessions on essential skills such as

resume building, optimizing LinkedIn and differentiating between business casual and professional attire.

While the organization's mission focuses on empowering Black women, it also strives to foster collaboration and cultural understanding across the campus community. The 100 Black Women of Charlotte partners with diverse student organizations to host events and encourage broader participation.

"We try to collaborate with a bunch of different organizations. They don't have to be predominantly Black organizations like the Black Law Club or Black Women in Medicine," said Curtis. "We would like to collaborate with the Public Health Association and the Center for Wellness Promotion. We want to get ourselves out there and connect with everyone within the UNC Charlotte community."

As senior executive board members prepare to graduate, they look forward to welcoming a new generation of leaders who will carry on the organization's mission. The spring inductions will celebrate new members and serve as a bittersweet farewell for graduating leaders.

The UNC Charlotte chapter of the 100 Black Women continues to make strides in promoting leadership and cultural awareness. As Black History Month unfolds, the chapter hopes for widespread support and participation from the campus and the greater Charlotte community.

"We want to open up the events for everyone," said Curtis. "All of our events are not just for our general body members. They're open to anyone to come to learn about Black history. Just as much as I'm learning more stuff, anyone else can learn. Stepping out of your shell is the big thing with Black History Month."



Sammie Giroux and Claire Schotta have new sticks to write Charlotte women's lacrosse history

Kelli Blackburn | Sports Editor

Change can be scary, but it also brings the thrill of making new memories, meeting new people and making history.

For Charlotte women's lacrosse graduate student midfielder Sammie Giroux and graduate student attacker Claire Schotta, that change means embracing a new home at Jerry Richardson Stadium.

The 2025 season marks the inaugural campaign for Charlotte's Division I lacrosse team—a vision nearly three

years in the making. While coaching hires and player recruitment came together quickly, Giroux and Schotta were two of the final foundational pieces to bring experience and leadership to a program starting from the ground up.

The duo's journeys to lacrosse began differently. With no close ties to the sport and lacrosse not being widely popular, Giroux explored other athletic paths.

That changed when her dad introduced lacrosse, sparking a passion that has driven her ever since.

"I used to be a soccer player growing up, and then my dad told me one day, 'I think you should try lacrosse; I think you'll be really great at it.' He got me into the sport," said Giroux. "And ever since then, I fell in love with it. He's definitely been a big role model for me."

In contrast, Schotta had older brothers who introduced her to the sport. Rob Schotta played at the University of Richmond from 2016 to 2019, and throughout their childhood, Schotta's curiosity grew from watching him. At her first lacrosse practice, she arrived in full men's gear, unaware of the difference but eager to play.

Before their paths

crossed in college, both players built impressive high school resumes. Schotta was a team captain for her lacrosse team while also competing in field hockey and basketball. Her athleticism earned her All-American, All-State and All-Conference honors at St. Anne's-Belfield High School in Charlottesville, Va. She was also named to be the Most Outstanding Player in Virginia for lacrosse.

Further north in New York, Giroux was a three-time team captain at Deer Park High School in Deer Park, N.Y. She was also a triathlete, playing basketball and soccer while earning two-time All-Division honors and Rookie of the Year recognition for lacrosse in 2016.

Post graduation, Schotta and Giroux played at Virginia Tech for the Hokies' lacrosse team. Though Giroux transferred to the University of Pittsburgh the following year, their time as teammates formed a bond that would unexpectedly reunite them in Charlotte.

"We actually started off at Virginia Tech, which is a funny story about us. [But] Coach Clare [Short] contacted me the first day I went into the transfer portal," said Schotta. "I took some time in the summer to just figure out exactly what I wanted to do, but then ultimately, I got back in touch with her, and she's unbelievable. She's so easy to talk to; I mean, all the coaches are. [And I] felt connected to them immediately. I actually reached out to Sammie too, and I was like, 'Hey, I'm interested...' She had already committed, so she had such positive things to say about the program."

Schotta stayed at Virginia Tech for four years, where she recorded 53 goals, 21 assists and 74 points. As a Hokie, she hit a career-high 22 goals through 17 games in 2024.

In Giroux's experience, the shift to Charlotte was not unfamiliar, but another opportunity for a fresh start. At Pittsburgh, she made five appearances for the Panthers in 2022 as part of its inaugural team. Coming off two points, two caused turnovers and 14 total appearances in 2023, Giroux suffered an ACL injury in 2024 that led to a medical redshirt. By 2025, she was ready for a new challenge and another chance to help build a program from the ground up.

On Aug. 12, 2024, the final 12 transfers, including Schotta and Giroux, were added to the 49ers' lacrosse roster as the program finally took shape.

Schotta credits the "OGs," the sophomore class, for laying the foundation by settling into practices, spreading the word about the team and cultivating a culture. Now, it was time to establish chemistry and inch closer to game day.

Giroux and Schotta's bond has evolved over the



years, almost as if an invisible thread kept pulling them back together.

The biggest takeaway from a change in teams is finding your footing with people, but for Schotta and Giroux, it was making sure they could translate their lessons

things that I think we both have ever done,” said Schotta. “We played against the best, but this conference also has some of the best teams in the country. I think that, again, just like influencing the younger kids and everyone on this team to come

“

“Culture was really important for us, and what I’ve taken from this is what we’re doing here. We’re trying to build a sisterhood here, and I think we’re doing a great job of that.”

**- Sammie Giroux,
graduate student midfielder**

of family from past teams into their new home in the Queen City.

“Building a culture at Pitt was amazing, and I’ve definitely learned some things along the way,” said Giroux. “Culture was really important for us, and what I’ve taken from that is what we’re doing here. We’re trying to build a sisterhood here, and I think we’re doing a great job of that.”

Not only does the team recognize the value of that bond, but so does Head Coach Clare Short, a proven winner who understands that success comes from skill, trust and communication.

“The sisterhood that I had is definitely what I’m implementing here,” said Short. “And I do believe that that was a huge portion of our success.”

The bond the 49ers have built was on full display on Feb. 8 as they dominated Gardner-Webb University 20-2 in their inaugural game at Jerry Richardson Stadium. Despite a cloudy day, the matchup created a bright moment for a vision that had finally come to life, one that is helping grow the women’s lacrosse community.

Schotta scored four goals in Charlotte’s new program’s historic debut. Her and Giroux’s leadership marked the start of something new on campus.

“Coming from the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), we played in the top competitive conference for four years, and it was one of the hardest

out strong, you can win any game on any given day. Coach Clare has won a lot of games, and she’s implemented that into every single thing we do. We always want to win, so I think that’s also part of the culture we’ve implemented.”

Now reunited, the duo of Schotta and Giroux hope to continue to mark themselves and Charlotte in the record books, creating a well-knit family that will keep growing.



Emmanuel Perkins/Niner Times



Lily Barger's history of success sets the standard for UNC Charlotte women's lacrosse

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

Since picking up a lacrosse stick, Lily Barger has been a winner and does not plan to lose in UNC Charlotte women's lacrosse's inaugural season.

The redshirt junior defender was Charlotte's only player named to the American Athletic Conference (AAC) Preseason All-Conference Team and transferred in from Wofford College, where she earned the single-season record for ground balls in a season and ranked No. 5 in the NCAA in the stat.

But this did not happen overnight for Barger; she got her start in the sport playing in middle school, where she said her team was a consistent county champion.

After early success in middle school, Barger stuck with the sport in high school, where she played alongside nine other Division-1 commits at Weddington High School in the Charlotte area.

At Weddington, Barger racked up accolades as a three-time all-state player, a 2021 All-American, conference defensive player of the year and a school record holder in ground balls and turnovers forced.

Barger credits her high school success to her teammates, who pushed her in daily competitions in practice and held her to a high standard in games.

"Being on a team with a lot of great athletes and players and people that definitely got me to where I am today," said Barger. "I wouldn't be there without my teammates from high school."

Following a successful high school career, Barger committed to Liberty University, where she redshirted her freshman year.

Although Barger did not see playing time as a redshirt, she found a deeper connection with her faith at Liberty, playing for a purpose far greater than just a win or loss.

"The only reason I play lacrosse is for Jesus and for God, and I wouldn't be here without Him today," said Barger. "Going to Liberty and representing a school that was faith-based was like our team was worried about something different and the bigger picture. Being on a faith-based team really helped motivate me and strengthen my faith throughout my time there."

While Barger no longer plays for Liberty, her connection to her faith has not weakened since leaving the University.

Before taking the field in every game, Barger reads Psalms 27, a verse that keeps her focused on the bigger picture she played for at Liberty.

"It's [Psalms 27] my favorite verse. It reminds me what I'm playing for and that it's the bigger picture for me. It reminds me that He's the main reason why I'm here today," said Barger. "I've been reading that verse before every game since seventh grade."

Feeling homesick after her freshman year at Liberty, Barger transferred to Wofford to get closer to home and challenged more academically.

A star on the field, Barger is no different in the classroom, where she majors in political science.

At Wofford, Barger made the student-athlete double life look easy, starting all 33 games, earning conference first-team and co-defensive player of the year honors and making the conference presidential honor roll.

Successful at Wofford, Barger has kept the ball rolling at Charlotte, finding herself on an all-conference team before even taking the field, earning preseason all-conference honors.

Barger says this recognition has put her in a leadership role on the team's defense but is not alone in guiding the new program in its foundational year.

"I'm just trying to do my part and work as a unit. Our defense is lethal, and I feel like we have a lot of great talent and seasoned players with a lot of experience," said Barger. "I feel like our experience is just going to compile, and we're just going to have such a strong defense."

As a Charlotte native, being surrounded not just by leaders on the team but a familiar setting helped pull the star defender from the transfer portal and to the Queen City.

"I love Charlotte; it's my home," said Barger. "Everyone is on the same page or really bought into this culture of laying the foundation for lacrosse here at Charlotte, and I'm just super grateful. I get to be surrounded by great players and great coaches who push me every day to be the best version of myself."

Another native to Charlotte is women's lacrosse Head Coach Clare Short, who coached at Queens University in Charlotte, where she led Queens to three straight appearances in the NCAA D-II Final Four, including an appearance in the national championship game in 2021.

Short brings a history of success and high-level competitive play to Charlotte and recognizes that Barger brings the same caliber of experience.

"[Barger's] a phenomenal defender. She plays a high-pressure defense, which is what we like to utilize on our defensive end, but her experience and knowledge from a high level [where she] has just played in so many games in her career," said Short. "So she really does bring that kind of competitive edge and that knowledge to our defense and all throughout our team."

Between Short, Barger and the rest of the 49ers' talented crew, Charlotte has all the pieces for a successful foundational year. After their first game against Gardner-Webb University, which ended in a 20-2 win for Charlotte, the 49ers seem to be on the right track.

Still, the 49ers' success will not come easy.

Any program in its first year is bound to see some bumps in the road to success, and with Charlotte placing No. 6 of seven teams in the AAC preseason, the 49ers' path may be especially rocky.

When those challenges do arise, the 49ers may look no further than to Barger to steady the ship and help them to success.

Emmanuel Perkins/Niner Times

Mike Hill lays the groundwork for success with UNC Charlotte's women's lacrosse

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

UNC Charlotte women's lacrosse is building history in their inaugural year, and Athletic Director Mike Hill is the architect behind it all.

Although the team kicked off their season in February 2025, bringing women's lacrosse to Charlotte has been in the works for over seven years.

When Hill was hired at Charlotte after his time as executive associate athletics director for external affairs at the University of Florida, discussions about bringing the sport to the Queen City had already begun.

After adding football in 2013, Hill said adding women's lacrosse was the next logical step in building up Charlotte Athletics. Efforts from the Executive Associate Athletics Director Ragean Hill helped Charlotte Athletics develop a pitch centered around pre-existing facilities for the program and the sport's popularity to present to decision-makers for approval.

Following some further research on the move and consultation with University leadership, it did not take much time to get the addition of the program approved.

"It was not a difficult sell at all. I think people recognize the popularity of the sport," said Hill. "In fact, a lot of people who are involved in that decision-making have either daughters or friends who play the game, and we're very enthusiastic about it."

As adding a program is no easy task, Charlotte Athletics was fortunate that Hill was a veteran in doing just that. During his tenure at Florida, the school added three new programs, one being women's lacrosse.

For Hill, the top lesson he learned while working to add those programs was to get out in front of everything far before the season was set to start.

"You have to be prepared and give yourself enough lead time because it can creep up on you," said Hill. "I've seen other programs where they'll hire a coach 18 months before their first game, and that's not a lot of time to put all the pieces together."

As the program's architect, Hill wasted no time taking his own advice and laying the foundation early by hiring Head Coach Clare Short.

With Short coaching at Queens University before her hiring at Charlotte, Hill did not have to look far in finding his new coach. While the proximity helped, Short's resume as Queens' all-time winningest coach and her ability to sell the city of Charlotte made her hiring what Hill called a "no-brainer."

"Clare is a no-brainer. She's got the pedigree, the success, as I said, she's got a fantastic compet-

itive drive, and she expects to build a championship-level program here," said Hill. "It's not going to happen overnight, but she's put the building blocks in place for us to build the kind of program that we all aspire to have. We're thrilled to have her."

Still, while hiring Short and getting the program approved was smooth sailing, the COVID-19 pandemic delayed the program's addition for three years.

The proposal was originally approved in a Feb. 11, 2020, UNC Charlotte Board of Trustees meeting, weeks before the pandemic shut down schools nationwide.

According to the meeting's minutes, the program was initially supposed to break ground and play its first game in the spring of 2023, but it was delayed until 2025.

Outside of the typical pandemic-related delays, finding room for the team on Charlotte's already busy campus and getting equipment were hurdles for the athletics department in launching the program.

Although the team worked through these obstacles and used existing facilities in their foundational year, Hill plans to provide the team with their own space in the future.

"Long term, we envision a field house space down there for lacrosse next to the practice field," said Hill. "These are obstacles that we work through, knowing it's part of being a first-year program. Considering we are brand new, it's gone really well. That's a credit to Clare [Short] and Ragean Hill for ensuring those pieces are in place."

With the program established and facilities in place, Hill has been hands-off in the recruiting process, leaving it up to Short to construct her roster.

Short was aided by the transfer portal, which allowed her to have some class balance in her roster, giving her the ability to pull veteran players from other teams.

As there was no existing program for Short to pitch to recruits, Hill said Short's pitch centered on her vision of a successful future for the team and its players.

For Hill, Short's vision does not stray away from his original blueprint of the program in building a consistent winner.

"My long-term vision is that this is a nationally competitive program, and I firmly believe that we can be that. And that's not just me. This is something that Clare and I talked about when we interviewed her. What really struck me was her vision: she wants to play for championships and be a nationally competitive program," said Hill. "It's not going to happen in one year. It's going to

take some time. But I do think that we've got the right person at the helm."

Still, with the foundation built, Charlotte's players are the pillars of this program's inaugural year, and Hill says the roster is aware of their importance.

"The young women who committed to play for this team understood they were going to be

a part of history, and that's really special. That says a lot about those young women," said Hill. "I think that takes some guts, some courage to do that and also some confidence, buying into the vision that Clare and everyone have laid out for them and what we aspire to be, and that's a championship-level program."



Five takeaways from UNC Charlotte women's lacrosse's historic first win

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

UNC Charlotte's women's lacrosse program started its inaugural season in maybe the best way possible with a 20-2 win against Gardner-Webb University (GWU) in front of a crowd of over 1,600 supporters.

While the sample size is undeniably small, there was plenty for 49er fans to take away as the team set the standard going forward.

Chemistry coming easy

As this is the team's first year, this was the time any of these players played together, so naturally, chemistry was a concern coming into the season. With only scrimmages and practice to develop on-field timing, it was assumed that it may take time for the team to gel.

Any worries were quickly vanquished as the 49ers looked fluid in their debut, playing together with confidence.

En route to the 20-goal performance, the team racked up 13 assists and was stifling defensively, working together to only allow seven shots from GWU.

In the postgame press conference, sophomore attacker Isa Torres, who had the program's first score, said the team had come together almost immediately upon arriving in Charlotte and had breakfast together the morning before the game.

"We all came from different places. It took, honestly, not a lot of time at all to get close to each other and build that connection," said Torres. "We've been working on the chemistry since fall, and just like that, we clicked, honestly, since we got here. Those are 27 of my best friends, and I hope I know I'm one of their best friends, too. It just comes so naturally to us, like we're all just happy to be out here and play together."

Offense initiates through the defense

Charlotte's offensive performance against

GWU was record-setting as it was the most goals scored in a program's debut in American Athletic Conference (AAC) history. Still, it would not have been possible without the team's relentless defense.

Even when the 49ers were up by double digits late in the game, each player made a strong effort to disrupt GWU's offense and allowed only five shots on goal in the entire game.

For the most part, GWU could not even get into their offense due to Charlotte's dominant performance in draw controls, winning 23 of 25. Freshman defender Hailey Kulesa was fantastic in preventing GWU possessions, winning game-high 10-draw control.

Competitiveness will keep them in games

Despite being a first-year program, players made it apparent throughout the postgame and through their performance that they did not intend to play like one.

The team kept intensity through four quarters despite the lopsided score. Even as Head Coach Clare Short shuffled through the team's rotation, getting all 27 players some run, each player came out strong.

Senior attacker Kylie Gioia said a preseason poll that ranked them No. 6 of seven teams kept them motivated throughout the week and in the game.

"We saw the American [Athletic Conference] preseason poll, and we were pretty upset that we were ranked six out of seven teams," said Gioia. "I think that's ridiculous for having as many changes as we do, as many good freshmen coming in. When we stepped on the field together, it just all showed. And I think we just wanted to be the underdogs, and I thought today we were, and I think it showed on the field."

Building that competitive edge, Gioia said the

team found motivation in wanting to top the University of South Florida's record of 19 goals in a program debut. Charlotte was able to beat the record, and their intent to do so was apparent as they kept their foot on the gas the whole game.

This ability to find motivation and keep consistent intensity will help keep Charlotte in matchups where they may be outmatched.

Charlotte looked strong 1 through 27

With the blowout, Charlotte was able to give every player some time on the field to give some players rest and others opportunities.

Despite Coach Short emptying her bench unit, the difference in play between starters and back-ups was not entirely noticeable.

The team did let up their only two goals allowed late but each player looked solid on both sides of the field.

Eleven different players scored and 22 recorded a stat in a true showcase of depth.

49ers still untested

The win was nice, but still does not prove much for the 49ers. GWU is 4-30 in their last two years of competition and was 0-17 in 2024.

An early win is nice to start the program off on a positive note, but how the 49ers respond when they are met with equal or superior competition is yet unknown.

The roster's mix of upperclassmen transfer students and younger recruits paired with Short's experience and resume as a career winner should create a recipe for success. However, the team's true effectiveness is still up to speculation.

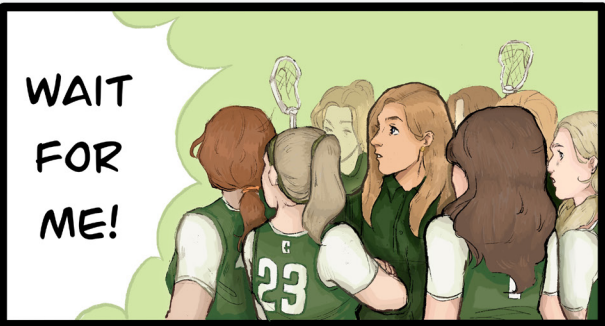
Their Feb. 14 matchup against Coastal Carolina University, a program that went 14-6 in 2024, projects to be their first competitive game and one that could be a wake-up call to this new 49er program.



Emmanuel Perkins/Niner Times

Niner's Comics: Norm takes on women's lacrosse

Blaise Uy | Staff Illustrator



Opinion: Donald Trump is not scary

Ava Harris | Asst. Opinion Editor



The road ahead for the next four years looks eerily similar to a long walk off a cliff for a lot of people, especially as more obscene executive orders begin to pile in and imperialist promises of buying Greenland or absorbing Canada are being made. Millions across the nation are feeling lost, disillusioned and frankly, exhausted.

But now is not the time for

fear-mongering and existential dread. The mourning period has passed; now is the time to organize, act and uplift one another. Now is the time to hold speakers to the voices of the marginalized and seek refuge with the people we love. Motivation and solidarity are the names of the game.

The reason everything may seem so daunting as of now is that we were raised in a time of unprecedented overarching global stability. Former President Barack Obama explained this in an interview with comedian Hasan Minhaj, “[Hasan] grew up, and in some ways, I grew up during this anomalous stretch of time in which, even though bad things were happening, for the most part, the trajectory of humanity was: things were getting better... there was this enormous sense that many of the ills of humanity were behind us.”

Because most of us have grown up in a world of progress, any moment of regression can feel like life as we know it is over. But, as your therapist might say, progress is not linear. Millions of people across the globe have witnessed the Great Depression, world wars, the

Cold War, dictatorships and famine and have lived to tell the tale. Those survivors know better than anyone—‘it’s not over ‘till it’s over.’

The president wants you to feel overwhelmed and confused with executive order after executive order, but as much as he wishes he had been crowned king of the United States, he does not wield an iron fist. He is simply throwing around power in these first hundred days like a toddler throws around spaghetti at lunchtime: it seems like a huge, irreparable mess upon first look, but it can be cleaned up with some elbow grease.

Letting our attention fall on every absurd order signed by the new administration distracts from the real damage that will need to be repaired. Mass deportations, reversal of climate action, rampant transphobia and looming homophobia are the big issues that need to be addressed through a critical lens.

Federal judges are and will continue to be working overtime to repeal many acts attempting to override the legislative process, but they can be repealed nonetheless. Checks and balances are embedded into our government not only at the federal level but, more importantly, at the local level. Your representatives, senators, mayors and city council members are the people whose job is solely to fight for you. Environmental efforts, civil rights protections and progressive initiatives can all be implemented at the grassroots level.

Whatever is done federally can often be easily undone locally. Elect people who refuse to kiss the ring and will work tirelessly in your best interest. Vote for the people you care about and for the people you may not even know who deserve to live without fear.

The people who occupy chunks of this country’s agricultural, textile, construction and food service industries, otherwise known as taxpayers, are being demonized by the current administration. The image of the U.S. as a melting pot was a staple in the primary education of millions of Americans for decades; this used to be one of the great prides of our nation. A country that is literally a giant puzzle of far-reaching cultures

should have eons more respect for its people, regardless of their paperwork.

LGBTQ+ people are also being placed on the political chopping block, with transgender women as the primary scapegoats. While it is beyond disheartening to watch the work of thousands of queer people over the years be trampled upon, this is a long war that has never been truly won. These four years will add battles that will be hard and tiring but will be fought with fervor.

Queer people are not going anywhere; trans people are not going anywhere. From Marsha P. Johnson at Stonewall to the Two-Spirit Native Americans, from Alexander Hamilton’s amorous correspondence with John Laurens to Frida Kahlo’s lady lovers, we have always been here. Efforts to roll back rights and protections will be met with unwavering resistance, just as they have been in decades past.

Now, get ready to know more about the U.S. government than you have probably ever cared to; get ready to support your political science friend’s journey through high blood pressure and get ready for that innocent global studies class you registered for to get uncomfortably heated. Get ready, but do not get scared. Turn your anxiety into adrenaline, your fear into movement.

The Statue of Liberty, a staunch symbol of American values, sits just outside of Ellis Island, where millions of immigrants once walked through in hopes of being greeted by the promise of America. The base where she stands reads in part, “Give me your tired, your/poor,/Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,/The wretched refuse of your teeming shore./Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,/I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Let the torch of Lady Liberty warm our tired, our poor, our huddled masses yearning to breathe free and hold us together. Grab your neighbor’s trembling hand and firmly hold your ground.

United with strength we stand; divided in fear we fall.



Opinion: Unaddressed commuter parking woes continue to hinder student success

Rachel Johnson | Staff Writer

It is a typical morning at UNC Charlotte. Students running late to their classes hurriedly shuffle across Craver Road. Chatter from the tables of clubs and organizations rings continuously down the long brick sidewalks. Fragrant aromas of coffee and chai flow from the walls of the Thoughtful Cup and Starbucks. Everything functions harmoniously until the first sounds of honking horns and swerving cars jarringly cut through the air. The 9 a.m. rush of cars begin to swarm into the parking decks, and commuters can only watch in horror as their likelihood of finding a space and promptly arriving at their next destination wanes.

Commuter parking has been an ongoing struggle for Charlotte students, especially after a record number of 31,901 students enrolled in fall 2024. 77% of Charlotte attendees live off campus, meaning over 24,000 students must compete for spots in four main decks and 12 lots. Commuter lots and decks must also be shared with faculty and sometimes even residents, making space more limited.

Students have expressed concerns about parking since before new admissions skyrocketed. Complaints on Reddit from 2022 convey the continuous frustration students have with limited parking availability within the main decks. Despite the ongoing nature of these complaints, the school has failed to introduce any initiatives that could aid commuters in finding parking on campus, leaving many students to drive aimlessly and spend valuable gas money in an attempt to find a secure place to station their car.

“For me, it’s difficult mainly because of how much time I have to add on to when I leave,” said Cassidy Cornett, a fourth-year commuter at Charlotte. “I usually have to plan 45 minutes ahead in the morning for parking. It’s stressful because the hardest part of my commute isn’t the drive itself; it’s finding parking for a 75-minute class.”

Having to take upwards of 15 minutes to find parking wastes the time and money of commuters who already have to pay \$480 for an all-access parking pass. Time searching for parking could also cut students’

class time, making them lose points off their attendance grades or miss important lecture notes. Car accidents that occurred in the CRI deck and Lot 6 in 2024 also present how the rushed state of students finding parking ultimately poses a safety issue.

“I’ve had stressful situations with struggling to fit in extra studying while balancing the time it takes me to find parking,” said Elizabeth Ronco, a first-year commuter at Charlotte. “It can be difficult to get to the library at an optimal time, especially on a test day, when I have to park in one of the open decks and often walk 10-15 minutes to my class building. For this reason, I typically commute to school as early as possible, sometimes before 7 a.m., in an attempt to guarantee a good, nearby parking spot.”

Charlotte does have simple options they can consider to open up space for commuters. Specific lots could be left for only commuters to occupy. Visitor parking could be opened up for commuters with valid permits. Funding could be allocated towards building larger parking areas or even towards constructing a new deck. Charlotte

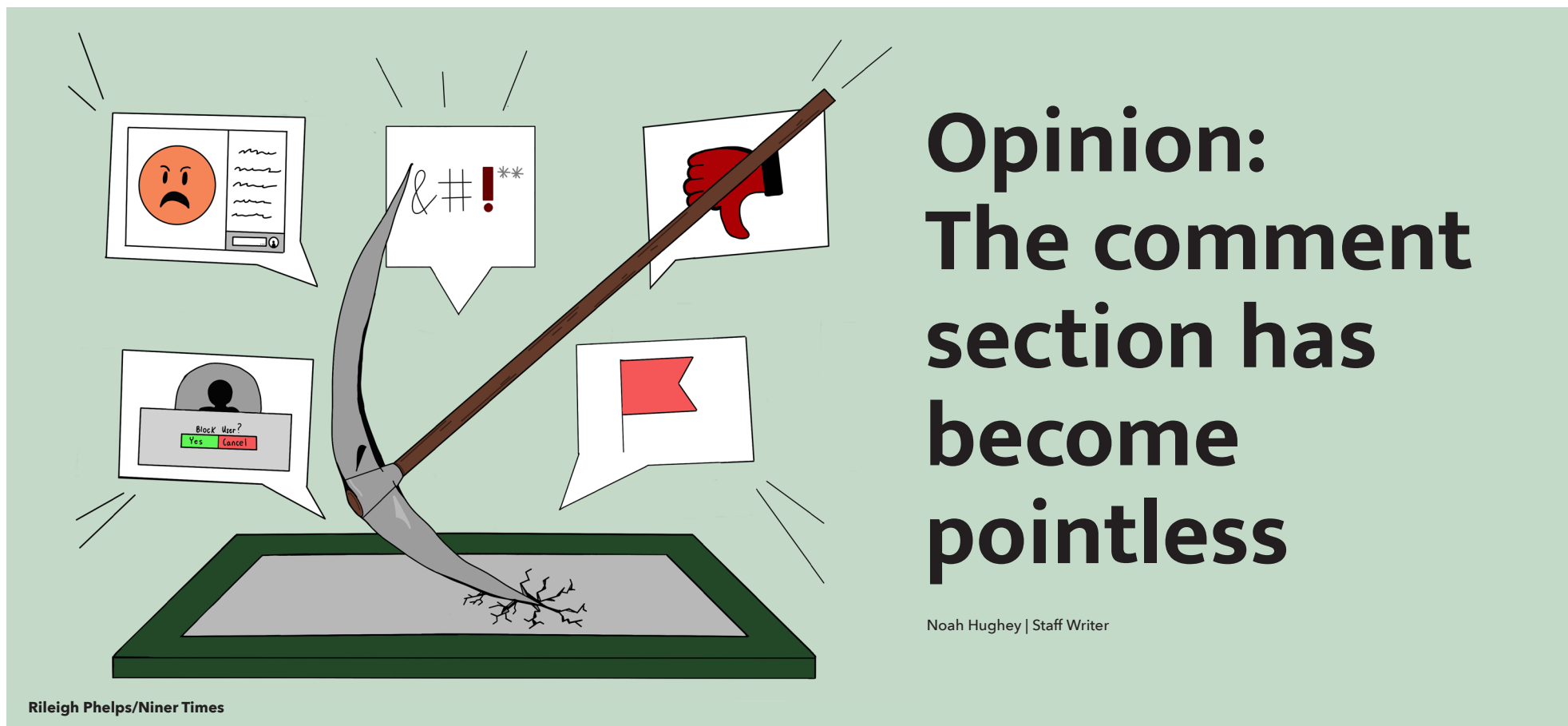
could also educate new commuters on which lots and decks are best to park in during busy times while maintaining close proximity to their classes and activities.

“Commuter parking should be a priority for [Charlotte] because it’s a major factor for prospective students who are deciding whether or not to attend,” said Ronco. “Charlotte can improve this dilemma by making commuter parking more accessible and easier to identify. Some options for accomplishing this would be to draw more attention to the commuter parking in first-year orientation guides or create an app to direct students to open commuter parking spaces throughout the school day.”

While making modifications and building new infrastructure takes funding and effort, commuters who dedicate hours of their day towards traveling deserve support from the authorities who claim to regard them as cherished members of the Charlotte community. Being a college student comes with an abundance of stressors, and finding a safe place to leave your car before class should not be one of them.



Megan Bentley/Niner Times



Opinion: The comment section has become pointless

Noah Hughey | Staff Writer

Raleigh Phelps/Niner Times

You see it on just about any social media platform: comments on pictures of clearly AI-generated photos of Jesus Christ made out of shrimp that seem far too clueless to be real. This is accompanied by an endless barrage of comments that very simply say, “So true!” There is no way this many people can be this unaware that the image is fake, can there? According to one theory, they may not be unaware. Maybe the comments are fake too.

It is called the dead internet theory, and it claims that content online generated by AI programs has surpassed that made by human beings. Bots are found replying to one another, attempting phishing scams against each other, or, in some of the more radical conceptions of the theory, arguing with each other.

This theory has caught the attention of, hopefully, human users online who have taken a keen interest in the obscure comments. But what makes them so alluring? It is not just the absurd nature of their content matter but the larger reflection on the digital scaffolding that they are propped up on. We mock them as being only possible if an AI generated them. They cannot possibly be the work of human beings because they are just so pointless. They lack any sufficient intellectual or emotional value to indicate humanity.

But then again, whose comments truly scream ‘intellectual and emotional value found here’ anymore? When does the comment section get referenced for examples of great literature or communication? Nobody is exactly writing their doctoral dissertation as a comment under a Red-

dit post, and when they are, the typical response is “I’m not reading all that.”

What this discussion about AI-generated comments has done is opened up a much more profound observation. It is not just these obtuse comments that seem pointless, but all of them. If you are actually paying attention to the comment section on most platforms, the available postings are short-range. From empty exclamations of approval for the content they are under to insecure condemnations of information posted that they do not agree with, no comment ever truly stands out.

Early theories of the internet posited it as a potentially democratizing force—a place where users would exchange ideas, learn and grow as a result of their online experiences. And this, no doubt, influenced ideas of the comment section becoming the last breeding ground for free expression in a world becoming increasingly hostile to it.

Perhaps these ideas were overstated. Contemporary internet discourse, if you have not noticed, is nothing near this breeding ground. Instead, the comment section tends to be the dumping ground for whatever uninformed opinions we have.

From the comments, we can claim whatever we want with no incentive to provide evidence or reasoning behind it. And if or when some meddlesome fact-checker comes along to disagree, the following argument becomes more a battle of wits than an exchange of ideas.

This claim is not just a truism about the toxicity of comments, either. There is evidence that

indicates toxic comments not only garner more attention online than more civil comments but that they also increase the toxicity of others’ comments.

This likely has to do with the incredible lack of credibility and thorough anonymity that comes with commenting online. With no one breathing down your neck and no obligation to show yourself, commenters are emboldened to throw out their most vile takes without giving them a second thought.

The distinction between whether that rude comment is the actual opinion of a person or a bot has become almost impossible. The presence of AI-generated content online has only skyrocketed over the course of the internet’s history. In one study published by researchers for Amazon Web Services and UC Santa Barbara, as much as 57% of web-based text may have been generated by AI if not translated by it.

Undetectable slews of AI-generated bots are taking advantage of the cesspool of internet discourse in the comment section to attempt scams and sow division online. Bots have long taken advantage of the poor quality of discourse to spread disinformation about everything from elections to international conflicts.

The first place to start when considering the comments in the future is to not take any of them too seriously. At best, they might be funny jokes that enrich the original entertainment of the posts they are attached to. But in many cases, especially when the content is inflammatory or controversial, they are prone to being uninformed and not very well-researched. Take them

with a grain of salt when you choose to read them, if you choose to read them at all.

With a more thoughtful approach to commenting, we can create better ways to channel our thoughts about the information we see online, strengthening media literacy as well as weakening the reach and impact of disinformation spread by AI programs in our comment sections and beyond.

Furthermore, consider your impact when wishing to comment on a post. The concept behind comments as an expansion of free discourse is still a noble one. But instead of posting a knee-jerk reaction, consider starting a blog. Substack is free. When you see something you do not like or want to talk about, spend more time on it. Do background research. Write something that is actually worth reading.

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UNC Charlotte hosts the Generations gallery reception

Ivory Galloway/Niner Times

The Projective Eye Gallery in The Dubois Center at UNC Charlotte Center City was home to the Generations gallery reception on Feb. 6, where work from faculty and alumni of UNC Charlotte's Department of Art & Art History was showcased in celebration of the 60th year of the department. Since establishing in 1964 by acclaimed North Carolina painter Maud Gatewood, the department has graduated over 3,000 Charlotte students.

