

ANOTHER YEAR ANOTHER DISAPPOINTMENT



Charlotte 49ers fall 43-41 in triple overtime
to FCS opponent, The Citadel.

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The Niner Times is UNC Charlotte's student-run news publication founded in 1947 and has received both state and national recognition.

We cover campus happenings, news and events in the city of Charlotte and North Carolina and topics that are important to students.

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UNC Charlotte events calendar

**Women's Soccer vs UNC
Wilmington**
Sept. 10, 7 p.m.
Jen Gaber Field

Faculty Dance Concert
Sept. 12, 7:30 p.m.
Robinson Hall, Anne R. Belk
Theater

Hech Lake Days
Sept. 15, 2-6 p.m.
Heckenbleikner Lake

Mens Soccer vs Winthrop
Sept. 15, 7 p.m.
Jen Gaber Field

**Exhibition Reception: The
Distance of the Moon**
Sept. 15, 6-8 p.m.
Storrs, Lambla Gallery

Niner Notes Open Mic Night
Sept. 14, 7-10 p.m.
Cone After Hours

From the Charlotte police logs (8/23 - 9/5)

Emily Schenkel | Asst. News Editor

Aug. 26 Investigate

Officers were dispatched to the Student Union in response to a suspicious female wearing black clothing and a ski mask riding the elevator. Officers searched the building and found the female on the 4th-floor stairwell to the roof. She was arrested for breaking and entering.

Aug. 31 Pull Station

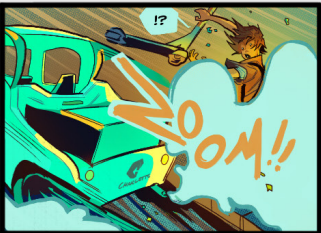
A fire pull station was activated at Levine Hall. Officers responding noticed smoke in South Village, continuing towards Robinson Hall. The source of the smoke was located at a residence. The residents were identified as students, and they said that they burned trash behind the house, causing the smoke.

Sept. 3 Animal Control

An officer was dispatched to Scott Hall in response to a snake being in the building. An officer was able to remove the snake from the building when they arrived.

Niner's Comics: Walk your wheels

Caitlin Hanson | Staff Illustrator



UNC Charlotte's central campus goes wheels-free, student's skeptical of effectiveness, necessity

Emily Schenkel | Asst. News Editor

As of fall 2026, UNC Charlotte's central campus is a pedestrian-only zone, prohibiting all wheeled devices.

This policy affects bicycles, scooters, skateboards, hoverboards, Segways, roller skates and other wheeled transportation.

Central campus includes all quads, side-walks and paths surrounded by Craver Road, Mary Alexander Road, University Road and Cameron Boulevard. Central campus also includes the Popp Martin Student Union and its surrounding sidewalks and walkways.

The "wheels-free" policy was created to address pedestrian safety concerns on campus.

The policy is the first step of many in hopes of achieving a safer and more accessible campus, according to the University. Other plans include adding protected bicycle lanes, larger device parking spaces, device charging stations and infrastructure to support cyclists.

Public bike racks are available for students who come to campus on a wheeled device. Students may leave their mode of transport at a bike rack or walk alongside it when walking around campus.

Student thoughts

Students criticized the University's decision to make central campus a pedestrian-only zone, bringing up concerns about

accessibility, enforcement and the distinction between different types of wheeled devices.

Fourth-year Arden Sanossian explained that the policy creates an accessibility issue, as she relies on her wheeled device to get from one place to another.

"I think it's a little funny that as soon as I drop \$600 on a scooter, we can't use scooters anymore. I use mine because I have a chronic illness, and I cannot walk around in the heat on my own without the risk of passing out and hurting myself," Sanossian said.

When addressing the idea that wheeled devices

could be unsafe for pedestrians, Sanossian said that if she is riding and someone is in her way, she gets off of her scooter, walks around them or moves into a bike lane.

Sanossian also said that the University's continued enrollment growth will make transportation and campus congestion more difficult if campus infrastructure does not keep up.

"I don't drive, but with how hard it is to park, I think you either have to give students more resources to be able to park or be more lenient about the fact that there's going to be scooters and

foot traffic," Sanossian said.

Third-year Ben Taylor said he believes electric wheeled devices present different concerns for pedestrians compared to other wheeled vehicles, like his longboard, which can be easily slowed down or picked up if necessary.

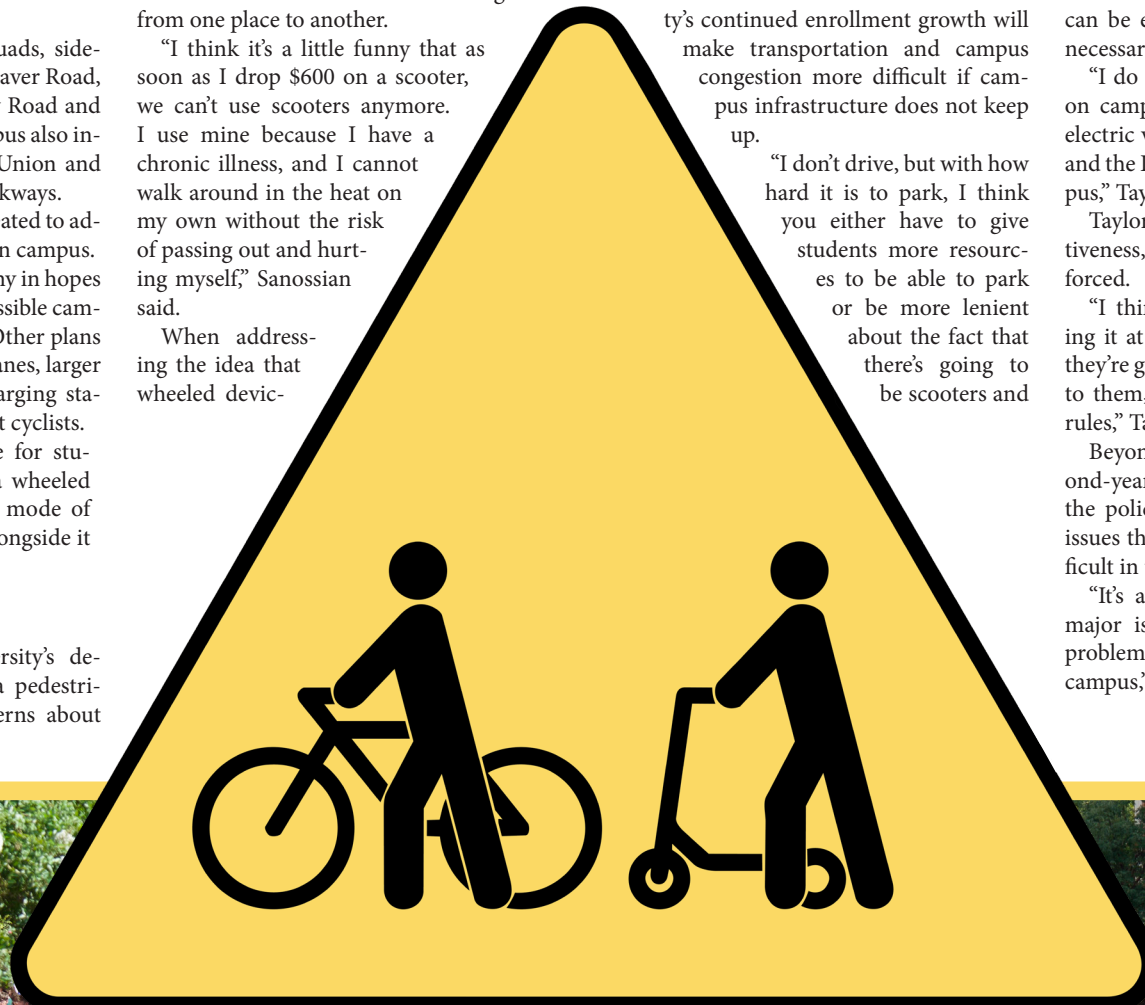
"I do think there's a problem with wheels on campus, but I think that leans towards electric vehicles, scooters, skateboards, bikes and the Lime bikes and scooters around campus," Taylor said.

Taylor also challenged the policy's effectiveness, saying that he hasn't seen it enforced.

"I think that the University isn't enforcing it at all, so the University can say what they're gonna say, but no one's really listening to them, and no one's enforcing any of the rules," Taylor said.

Beyond enforcement concerns, second-year Gabriel Perry questioned whether the policy addresses any of the underlying issues that make getting around campus difficult in the first place.

"It's a hypocritical rule that ignores the major issues and doesn't address the real problem that instates the issues of traversing campus," Perry said.



Lexue Zhao/Niner Times

Eliminating the Digital Divide provides 250 free laptops to first-generation Charlotte students

Montserat Marcelo-Morales | Staff Writer

On Thursday, Aug. 20, the Office of Transition and Belonging gave 250 free laptops to first-generation UNC Charlotte students in the Cone Center thanks to a partnership with Eliminating the Digital Divide (E2D).

The laptop distribution aimed to reduce financial barriers for first-generation college students.

E2D is a nonprofit that helps eliminate the digital divide by ensuring that North Carolina students have accessible laptops.

According to the “I Am First Gen” section of the UNC Charlotte Transition & Belonging website, being a first-generation student means being the first in your immediate family to attend college. This includes having

parents or guardians who have not received a degree from a four-year institution.

About 33% of students at UNC Charlotte identify as first-generation college students.

During the summer, first-generation Charlotte students had the opportunity to sign up for a free laptop if needed.

With the reliance on Canvas and other academic software, a free personal laptop can reduce student stress by providing a reliable device to complete assignments.

Shayauna Newsom, program director of Transition and Belonging and co-chair of the 49er First Gen Support Committee, said the partnership with E2D is important to students because of their heavy reliance on technology and how personal it is to them.

“I know for myself, I use my laptop every single day, and even when I was in college, I started college without a laptop, so I know the struggle of having to have a semester ahead, and not necessarily knowing how or when you’re going to do your work, and being dependent on computer labs, or areas that have laptops accessible, or desktops accessible, was a very big part of my college experience [during] my first two years,” Newsom explained.

According to Worldmetrics, 68% of first-generation college students report high financial stress. For students already experiencing financial stress, the lack of a laptop can be an additional barrier.

E2D has been helping North Carolina students cover the expense of a laptop, giving them reliable access to a device they can use for school.

“You always have it, versus if you go get a loaner from the library or some of those situations where you don’t necessarily have the flexibility, that’s your device. You can do what you need to do with it. Something that I’m excited about in the future is keeping UNC Charlotte as part of that programming,” Megan Foster, E2D’s communication and marketing manager, stated.

Foster is a 2020 UNC Charlotte alumna who earned her master’s degree from the Department of Communication Studies. As a former student, seeing the partnership come to UNC Charlotte was meaningful, and it reminded her of the opportunities a laptop can bring to students that do not already have access to one.

“I know how it’s felt for me to be able to work with clients and how incredible it is when folks get that computer. I call it the blue bag effect. We have these blue bags computers come with, and you just see how people respond to this, a world of possibility that a computer opens up for you when you don’t have that access. Hearing that we were finally able to get something set up at UNC Charlotte, I was really excited,” Foster explained.

The Office of Transition and Belonging consistently provides assistance to first-generation students.



Eliminating the digital divide

From 2013 to 2024, E2D has distributed a total of 68,001 devices.

There are a few elements taken into consideration when making sure laptops are distributed to students.

“There are a couple of different components. So it’s, ‘Do you have access to reliable technology?’ ‘Can you even access a device?’ which could be a laptop, computer, smartphone, etc. ‘Do you have access to the internet?’ Whether that be something you can pay for or you can go to an open-source Wi-Fi, like a cafe or library,” Foster elaborated.

Because of the technology at UNC Charlotte, laptops were able to be given back to the community. The partnership with E2D created the opportunity for first-generation students to use these laptops.

How to get involved

E2D distributes devices across North Carolina and accepts donations in the form of technology, monetary funds and volunteer work.

“We used to go to EveryLibrary and do these huge public distributions. We’ve done those from time to time. We do Tech Tuesdays every month. If you get on our communication list, we send you information that says, ‘Hey, you’re on our list that says that you need a laptop. Please come to our lab,’” Foster explained.

Students can request a laptop through E2D’s request form. To qualify for a free laptop, they must demonstrate economic need. Even if students aren’t eligible for a free laptop, they can pay a subsidized rate of \$100 per device.

The Office of Transition and Belonging has some events planned for the rest of the semester for students to attend and gain resources. The resources aren’t just for first-generation students, but for everyone.

“There’s a whole group of people who care very deeply about our first-gen students, and in our office, we support not only our students, but every student on campus. So we just try to make sure that Niner pride exists on every square inch of it,” Newsom said.



Amid growth and closures, new restaurants open in University City

Kyle Boucher | News Editor

Over the summer of 2026, many new businesses opened throughout University City, the northeastern section of Charlotte surrounding UNC Charlotte. Below is a guide to many of these new restaurants.

- Vitality Bowls, Opened: May 22, 2026. From Açaí bowls to protein smoothies, wraps and paninis, Vitality Bowls advertises itself as a healthy option that uses organic ingredients.
- Al Ramleh Roastery, Opened: May 24, 2026. Based on the coffee culture of Ramleh, Palestine, this cafe serves Arabic-inspired coffees, sweets, nuts and spices.
- Icecream Factory, Opened: July 1, 2026. This shop offers various frozen treats such as regular cones, ice cream tacos, ice cream nachos and various beverages.
- Palm Berries, Opened: July 25, 2026. Offering numerous custom Açaí bowls, Palm Berries also serves smoothies, juices and milk beverages.
- Ono Grinds Hawaiian BBQ, Opened: Aug. 15, 2026. Serving walk-ins or catering orders, this barbecue restaurant uses a Hawaiian twist on steak, chicken and burgers.

Some restaurants opening in the future include Shinjuku Station, an all-you-can-eat revolving sushi bar, and Songbirds Wine Bar, a music-themed bar that will host local artists and bands.

Rapid summer growth

In addition to the restaurants listed, several other restaurants and small businesses have opened in University City since the start of the year.

University City Partners (UCP), a non-profit organization that works to grow the University City area, has been monitoring the new businesses that have opened in recent years.

Through a connection at a marketing agency called Black Wednesday, the Niner Times gathered quotes from Keith Stanley, CEO of UCP.

"I would describe Charlotte's restaurant scene as growing, but it is also becoming more competitive as more people move here every day. We are seeing new concepts and

locally owned restaurants continue to enter the market, and there is definitely a lot of energy around food and hospitality in the city right now," Stanley said.

In June 2026, University City received approval to increase its property tax and expand its boundaries. This increase is funding expansions throughout the area to improve the commercial and residential sectors.

These expansion projects include welcoming new businesses to the University City area. UNC Charlotte has also seen another year of growth, breaking its enrollment record for the third year in a row.

"Development is another major factor in restaurant growth, as many owners compete to open in areas where people naturally work and live. New housing, offices, schools and other businesses bring more people into an area, which can create the foot traffic a restaurant needs to succeed," Stanley said. "In University City, we see that, with UNC Charlotte, growing residential communities and continued development bring more students, residents and jobs to the area, creating more opportunities for restaurants."

Is the growth sustainable?

The greater Charlotte area has seen steady population growth trends over the last few years, along with economic growth.

While there are recent growth trends in the greater Charlotte area, 27 local businesses closed in August 2026.

"Food, labor, construction and rent are all high costs, and these expenses can make it difficult for independent restaurants to operate in the long term," Stanley said. "I think the goal has to be to ensure that the conditions that allow local businesses to start here also allow them to stay here. There are 140+ restaurants and food and beverage businesses in University City, and roughly 44,000 jobs."

Some Charlotte businesses had to close for other reasons, such as legal issues and copyright conflicts, or because private business owners retired.

The sustainability of University City's growth will depend on how much more labor, rent and stock prices increase. If University City grows too quickly, businesses may struggle to keep up with rising costs.

new!



Courtesy of Ono Grinds Hawaiian BBQ, Palm Berries & Vitality Bowls

Megan Khor & Sophie Wang/Niner Times

New season, same disappointment:

Charlotte football stunned by The Citadel in triple overtime

Evan Campos | Staff Writer



Emmanuel Perkins/Niner Times

It has now been 358 days since Charlotte football last won a game.

In the first triple-overtime game in program history, the 49ers suffered a disastrous result to open their 14th season, falling 43-41 to Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) opponent The Citadel Bulldogs on Sept. 5.

Charlotte entered the matchup as a more than 20-point favorite across major sportsbooks in what was widely considered the most winnable game on its early schedule.

Instead, the 49ers walked away with one of the most deflating losses imaginable to begin a critical second year under head coach Tim Albin and the first football season of Kevin White's tenure as athletic director.

The biggest culprit was Charlotte's defense. After allowing 36.3 points and 471.9 yards per game while recording just 14 sacks a season ago, Defensive Coordinator Nate Faanes' unit showed little indication of improvement in the opener, once again looking like one of the worst defenses in the FBS.

What went wrong

Poor tackling is a common issue across col-

lege football during the first few weeks of the season. With teams unable to hold scrimmages against outside competition during spring or fall camp, tackling is frequently at its worst early in the year.

Charlotte, however, took those early-season struggles to another level. Rarely do you see a collective tackling performance that inept from an FBS defense, and The Citadel took full advantage.

Graduate running back Gavin Garcia from The Citadel rushed for 137 yards and three touchdowns, while redshirt sophomore running back Sebastien Boyle also found success in the Bulldogs' outside-zone and spread-option concepts.

The Citadel finished with 268 rushing yards and six rushing touchdowns, consistently reaching the second level of Charlotte's defense, particularly throughout the third and fourth quarters, while turning missed tackles into explosive gains and first downs.

Despite the 49ers putting together a relatively solid defensive performance in the first half, holding the Bulldogs to just 104 total yards, things quickly unraveled after halftime. The Citadel scored touchdowns on three consecutive possessions, with graduate quarterback Nick Billoups taking over the offense after redshirt senior quarterback Quentin Hayes exited the game in the second quarter.

Surprisingly, the Bulldogs became more dynamic with Hayes, the Southern Conference Preseason Player of the Year, sidelined. Billoups brought more optionality to The Citadel's play-

book, making the offense less predictable while efficiently pushing the ball downfield at times. He also rushed for 38 yards and two touchdowns.

Much like last season, Charlotte's pass rush was a non-factor for most of the game, recording just one sack and frequently losing gap integrity up front. That gave Billoups time to attack a 49ers cornerback room that entered the year as one of the biggest question marks on the roster.

As easy as it would be to pin the loss entirely on the defense, Charlotte's offense also left plenty of meat on the bone. On paper, the 49ers had a huge day, racking up 538 total yards, picking up 21 first downs and converting 11 of their 17 third-down attempts.

Graduate quarterback Cole Gonzales accounted for five total touchdowns and threw for 322 yards, but his performance was far from spotless. Gonzales threw two first-quarter interceptions in plus territory, both of which were on him, helping keep the game much closer in the first half than it should have been.

Charlotte also committed multiple false starts in goal-to-go situations, and Gonzales missed open receivers on multiple occasions throughout the game, including on the final play, when he sailed a pass over junior wide receiver Jaylen Hampton, who was open for what could have been the game-tying score.

Those missed opportunities, coupled with Charlotte's defensive woes, culminated in The Citadel's 10th victory over an FBS opponent since Division I football was reclassified into I-A and I-AA in 1978 and its first such win since Sept. 14, 2019.

What went right

As bottom-tier as Charlotte's defense was last year, its offense was arguably worse. The 49ers averaged just 14.3 points per game, ranking among the bottom four teams in the FBS in both scoring offense and total points.

This year's offense already looks significantly more explosive and threatening with the personnel Charlotte added during the offseason. Appalachian State University transfers senior running back Khamani Alexander and senior wide receiver Jaden Barnes both stood out in the opener and could be in line for big seasons if they can stay healthy.

Barnes' speed and twitchiness were immediately apparent, particularly with his ability to accelerate in quick-game concepts and stretch the field vertically on fade routes.

Alexander was Charlotte's best offensive player against The Citadel. He rushed for 138 yards while averaging nearly 10 yards per carry, highlighted by a 66-yard touchdown run, the 49ers' longest scoring play from scrimmage since a 75-yard pass against Florida Atlantic University in 2024.

Graduate running back Chance Williams also impressed with an expanded workload, getting involved early as both a receiver out of the backfield and a runner between the tackles.

Among Charlotte's returning playmakers, Hampton finished with eight receptions for 117 yards and two touchdowns. Junior wide receiver Derrick Eley flashed good juice in the return game and on screens and swing passes while showing good rapport with Gonzales.

For Gonzales' first performance at Charlotte, the transfer signal-caller showed plenty of arm talent, connecting with Hampton and Eley on several well-placed deep posts. He also displayed his mobility and toughness as a runner.

Overall, it was an encouraging first game for Gonzales, despite the turnovers and occasional struggles with his ball placement. Those are areas he will need to clean up, but he already looks like a better fit for Todd Fitch's offense than last season's quarterbacks.

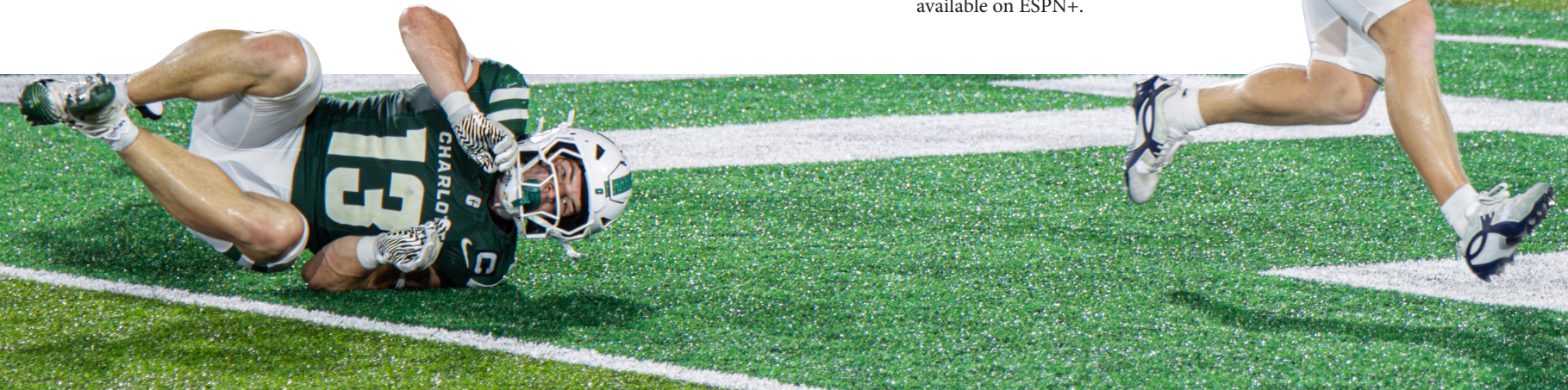
The few positive performers on Charlotte's defense included senior safety Collin Gill, who finished with 11 total tackles. Junior defensive end Curtis Simpson also did a nice job defending the run and containing the edge.

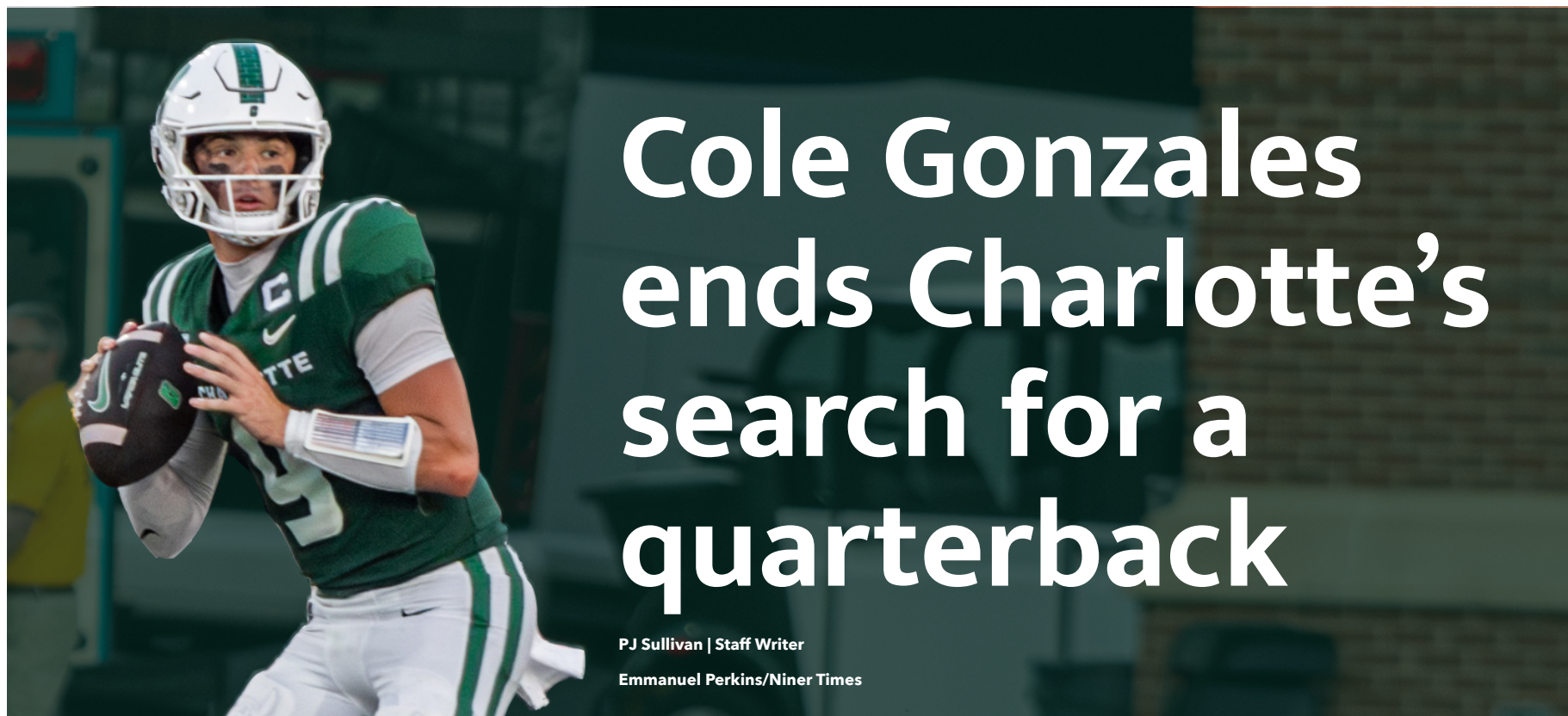
Graduate linebacker Kadin Schmitz continued to provide the same consistent, quality play he showed game to game last season, something that does not appear to be going anywhere.

Now, it is up to the rest of Charlotte's defense to pick up the slack and play as a more connected unit. The 49ers will certainly need to do so against their next two opponents to give themselves a fighting chance.

Up next

Charlotte will travel to Oxford, Mississippi, to face the No. 9 Ole Miss Rebels in Week 2 at Vaught-Hemingway Stadium on Sept. 12. Kickoff is scheduled for 7:45 p.m., with streaming available on ESPN+.





Cole Gonzales ends Charlotte's search for a quarterback

PJ Sullivan | Staff Writer

Emmanuel Perkins/Niner Times

Graduate quarterback Cole Gonzales, who transferred from the University of Pittsburgh, won the starting QB job ahead of Charlotte's first game against The Citadel. Gonzales beat out returning quarterbacks including graduate Conner Harrell and senior Grayson Loftis.

A turbulent 2025 quarterback situation

Charlotte's quarterback play last season featured three quarterbacks, with Harrell getting the start. Harrell transferred from the UNC after two seasons there.

A highlight performance came against Monmouth University, where he threw for 382 passing yards with an 86.7 completion percentage and three touchdowns. His performance and leadership led Charlotte to its one and only victory last season in a 42-35 shootout. However, in the following matchup against Rice University, Harrell was injured in the second quarter and was ruled out for the rest of the season with an MCL sprain, torn ACL and meniscus. After his injury, Charlotte would have to look elsewhere for a quarterback.

The next man up after Harrell's injury would be Grayson Loftis. A transfer from Duke University, Loftis would be Charlotte's quarterback for the remainder of the season. He played in 11 games for Charlotte and contributed 1,415 passing yards, eight touch-

downs and eight interceptions. Loftis would not have an easy time at quarterback after coming into a turbulent situation following the Harrell injury; the team would struggle, not winning a single game under Loftis. He was not the only quarterback who would play after the Harrell injury.

Redshirt junior Zach Wilke also saw some playing time last season. He played in six games, with most of his stats coming against the University of South Florida and his lone start against Army in the following week. When the season concluded, Wilke transferred to Northwestern State University after just one season in Charlotte.

Loftis and Harrell were both hoping to get the start before the season. Harrell hoped to improve coming off his injury, but he will not be active heading into Game 1. Loftis was looking to show what he learned during his time as the starter. However, Cole Gonzales, former Western Carolina University standout and recent transfer from Pittsburgh, would join the 49ers quarterback room.

Gonzales' prior experience

Gonzales spent his previous collegiate career at three different schools, with most of his playing time coming at Western Carolina University. At WCU, Gonzales was one of the most noteworthy players in program history. Currently, Gonzales sits near the top of multiple passing records for the WCU Cat-

amounts.

Throughout his three seasons with the Catamounts, he would contribute 6,682 passing yards and 51 passing touchdowns. This is the second-most passing touchdowns and third-most passing yards in Catamounts history. He was also All-SoCon First Team in his second and third years. At the Division I FCS level, Gonzales recorded the third-best quarterback passer efficiency in 2023 with an efficiency of 166.40. After such a successful career at Western Carolina, Gonzales looked to a different college at the highest level of college football.

After his third season with the Catamounts, Gonzales would transfer to the University of Oklahoma. However, his stint with the Sooners was cut short when he announced his transfer to Pittsburgh after spring practices.

During his season with Pittsburgh, he saw little playing time. In three games, Gonzales recorded 118 passing yards as well as one touchdown. After his season with Pittsburgh, he would look to transfer to his fourth school. Ahead of spring practices, Cole Gonzales announced that he would transfer to Charlotte.

The battle comes to an end

During spring practices, head coach Tim Albin would not announce the starting quarterback for Week 1 until the week before the matchup against The Citadel.

The competition between Gonzales, Harrell and Loftis would be joined by sophomore Luke McNulty, in his second year at Charlotte after playing high school football at Marantha High School in Pasadena, California. The newcomers to the quarterback room included three-star freshman Jaylen White from Clearwater High School in Clearwater, Florida, and three-star freshman Brody Dawyot from Glenvar High School in Salem, Virginia. White displayed potential in his final high school season with 1,880 passing yards and 31 total touchdowns, while Dawyot would switch positions from quarterback to tight end during spring practice.

Ultimately, the battle would come down to two players: Harrell and Gonzales. Both were named team captains for the offense ahead of Week 1, proving both were viable options and leaders the offense needed. The team would land on Cole Gonzales to get the start ahead of the team's Week 1 matchup against The Citadel at Jerry Richardson Stadium in Charlotte. Gonzales and the Charlotte coaching staff hope he returns to the form he displayed at Western Carolina. Harrell, who is still battling injuries, would not be listed on the depth chart for Week 1. Loftis is listed as the backup, with White as the third quarterback.

Can Tim triumph? What the past tells us about Year 2 under Albin

Sean McGuffin | Staff Writer

Morale coming into the 2026-27 Charlotte 49ers Football season is mixed, to say the least. Since classes started back, campus discussions have ranged from glass-half-full optimism, believing that Tim Albin can put the 49ers back on the right track, to cynicism from those who are just ready to get to basketball season.

Albin's past tenure at other schools, as well as the last time Charlotte had a one-win season, may give us some insight into what to expect at Jerry Richardson Stadium this year.

The kid from Oklahoma

Albin started his coaching career very early, taking the offensive coordinator job at his alma mater, Northwestern Oklahoma State, just six years after playing there. It only took three seasons working with the offense for Albin to be promoted to head coach in 1997.

In his first season as head coach, his Rangers went 5-5. A fine record for a first-year head coach, but his second year would be the first time his culture development and adaptability would be seen. With a 7-3 record and a season-ending ranking of No. 21 in the NAIA, Year 2 of Albin was impressive, but Year 3 would be the true statement year with a 13-0 season ending with an NAIA championship.

Albin left Northwestern Oklahoma State after his perfect season and took a job as an assistant coach at Nebraska. He bounced around America's heartland taking assistant and coordinator jobs before landing at the school where he would make his name, Ohio University.

The MACtion years

Albin would serve as offensive coordinator at Ohio from 2005-2020 before being promoted to head coach for the 2021 season. It was Albin's first head coaching job in over 20 years at the NCAA level. Thrust into the role unexpectedly, Albin had a very short time span to assemble his roster and prepare for the season. The first year with the Bobcats would be less than ideal, going 3-9 and winless in non-conference play.

Year 2 with Ohio would be a much different story; with a full offseason to work with, Albin shocked the conference in 2022, going 10-4 and getting his first Bowl win as a head coach. This would be the first of three con-

secutive 10-win seasons with the Bobcats, with Albin winning two MAC Coach of the Year awards in that span. Albin would depart the Bobcats in 2024 directly after winning the MAC championship, ending his two-decade career in Athens, Ohio.

The right place at the wrong time

The Charlotte 49ers announced Albin as the fourth head coach just days after he officially departed from the Bobcats. This announcement generated buzz in national football news, making it clear Charlotte had gotten a quality hire. The only downside to Albin's hiring was the timing; coming to the Queen City in December meant that Albin had very little time to put together a roster for spring. The first spring practice under Albin assembled just over 60 players — a very limiting number to say the least.

The low turnout resulted in very limited practices going into the 2025 season and a lack of depth on the roster. The lack of depth became even more apparent in an injury-riddled 2025 campaign. A tough American Conference schedule including two ranked teams and non-conference games against Appalachian State and No. 3 Georgia added to the troubles. Charlotte finished the gauntlet of a season tying a school-worst 1-11 record, their only win being a close one against an FCS team, Monmouth.

Adaptable Albin

When spring of 2026 rolled around, training camp looked more like what you expect to see from a program of Charlotte's size. Ninety-nine players reported to camp, including 15 of 19 newly-signed high school recruits. At the American Conference Media Day, Albin spoke highly of the quantity and quality of the players. Charlotte went from seven players with a speed of 20 mph or faster to more than 40.

Albin gave the offensive and defensive lines heavy praise during fall camp, with a 12-pound heavier offensive line and a nearly 10-pound heavier defensive line coming into 2026. Charlotte football is coming into the season bigger, faster and stronger. However, the team faces one of the most challenging schedules in program history.

Tough teams at Jerry's Place

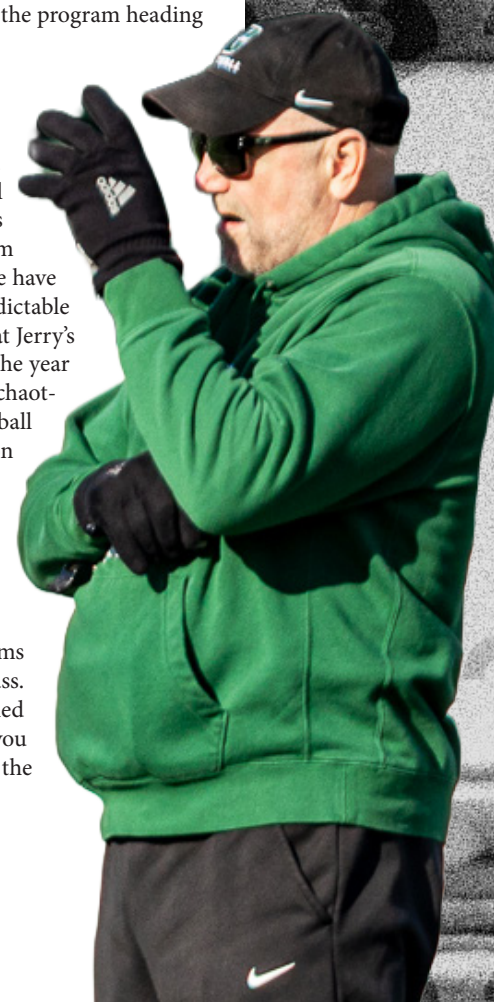
To call the 2026 football schedule challenging is an understatement. Disregarding Week 1 against the Citadel, Charlotte will face National Championship contenders Ole Miss and in-state rival Appalachian State on the road. The home schedule is especially challenging with Memphis, Tulane, East Carolina and Navy all coming to Jerry Richardson Stadium this fall.

The 49ers have another gauntlet of a schedule, but Week 1 against The Citadel was very telling. Last year, Charlotte's only win came against Monmouth University in the yearly FCS tune-up game. But the tune-up game turned into a nail-biter as the 49ers eked out a 42-35 win. Charlotte opened up against their FCS opponent this season; such a conclusive loss to the Bulldogs has already injured confidence in the program heading into a tough season.

Expect the unexpected

As nice as it would be to have a crystal ball that showed us exactly how the team will do this season, we have already seen unpredictable moments in Game 1 at Jerry's Place and the rest of the year is sure to be just as chaotic. If this 49ers Football season were played on paper, we'd be looking at another down year for the program — but Albin doesn't coach teams who play on paper; he coaches teams who play on grass. When an Albin-coached team takes the field, you can expect one thing: the unexpected.

Rolando Vera Hi-fong
& TJ Carter/Niner Times



Appalachian State transfer Jaden Barnes looks to make impact in first year at Charlotte

PJ Sullivan | Staff Writer

Senior wide receiver Jaden Barnes, a Georgia native, enters his first year with the Charlotte football program after previously spending a year as a receiver at Appalachian State University. Before that, he played as a receiver at Austin Peay State University.

Similar environment

Barnes, now at his third university in four years, is not fazed by the jump to a different school. The environment has made it easy for the receiver to adapt. Charlotte and the campus almost feel similar to what he was used to back home.

Barnes described Charlotte as similar to his hometown, Atlanta, Georgia, before arriving on campus.

"I mean, it reminds me of home because I'm from Atlanta. It's really just like the same city for real," Barnes said.

Charlotte staff and teammates have also helped with the jump from Boone to Charlotte. Barnes has felt an impact from everyone in the program.

"The coaches welcomed me in with open arms," Barnes said. "It was a really fitting environment."

Throughout his time here, the team has created an environment that cares for a new transfer.

"I'm comfortable with everybody. We get along real well," Barnes said.

As a new member of the team, Barnes is looking to grow and build chemistry with his teammates. Ahead of the season are many practices that appear to be successful. Getting wins and bonding will be key to team chemistry.

When asked about the team goals for the season, Barnes said, "Just trying to get closer. Just win a lot of games."

Meeting his old team

One of the most interesting storylines for Barnes this season is his matchup against his former team.

The Charlotte 49ers and Appalachian State Mountaineers will face off at Kidd Brewer Stadium in Boone on Sept. 19, a rematch of last year's game at Bank of America Stadium where the Mountaineers defeated the 49ers 34-11.

"I can't wait for that game," Barnes said. "It's already marked on my schedule."

Barnes put on a stellar performance against the 49ers last year with six re-

ceptions for 134 yards and a touchdown. His performance was a standout and a key contributor to Appalachian State's win and their overall success last season.

Barnes aims to bring that same energy to the 49ers when they play against the Mountaineers in Boone. In this matchup, he will compete against some of his former teammates and his previous head coach, Dowell Loggains, who is entering his second year coaching the Appalachian State football team.

Barnes' impact on the team

In his last few seasons, Barnes has put up solid numbers that he aims to build on this season.

Throughout his college career, he has accumulated 1,878 receiving yards and 17 touchdowns. This includes a thousand-yard season in his second year at Austin Peay. Last season, Barnes had 608 receiving yards and seven touchdowns.

Barnes was inspired by the NFL wide receivers

he watched growing up. He mentioned how NFL players Odell Beckham Jr. and Tyreek Hill inspired him to become the wide receiver he is today with the 49ers.

Since joining the team, even before the start of the season, he has been looking to make an impact. Although it's his first year with the team, his college experience has helped him become a strong voice in the locker room. He has already tried to become a leader for the team, especially for newer recruits.

"I've been taking that role very serious," Barnes said. "I'm just trying to lead the room in the right way so they'll all be on the same page so that we can function at the same time."

Barnes and the team have high expectations for the season, looking to improve on last season's 1-11 record. While the media and some fans may be doubtful based on last season's performance, that will not define the team this time around. With Barnes' leadership, the team is looking to improve as Charlotte football coach Tim Albin heads into his second year.

When asked how the team feels about anyone who has doubts, Barnes said, "I say just buy a ticket and you'll see."



Emmanuel Perkins/Niner Times

Charlotte vs. The Citadel



Emmanuel Perkins & Alexander Rodriguez/Niner Times

Opinion: Self-help books aren't the answer to the male reading crisis

Aiden Adamo | Staff Writer

“Reading is a less common hobby than it used to be” is a sentiment most people share, likely because it is a reality that stares us in the face, quite demanding, throughout our day-to-day lives. Anecdotally, I’m sure many of us can recall times when the question “What was the last book you read?” was met with chuckling and a surprisingly shameless reference to a children’s story we enjoyed as third-graders in a school library.

I’m also sure it wouldn’t shock anyone reading this to hear that statistics back up this idea. A recent study published in iScience looked at over 20 years of reading data from the American Time Use Study, and found that daily reading, simply for pleasure, has fallen by more than 40% in the last 20 years.

But to me, it’s not the crisis itself that lacks a logical explanation. Reading is an attention-oriented hobby, and we live in a time when attention has become a

currency harder to earn than ever. Everyone has access to an endless amount of entertainment and distractions on their cell phones. Through social media, the content we consume is filtered to support instant gratification through jump cuts, ten-second videos and an intentionally designed, endless feed of short-form content.

Reading as a form of entertainment is, in many ways, the antithesis of short-form content. It demands you shut off the possibility of other distractions or forms of leisure and be fully present to experience the words on a page, spending minutes, hours, days or weeks at a time to fully get what you’ve paid for out of a novel.

What I have found disappointing and somewhat confusing, however, is the response from a large portion of men. The decline in reading has been even more prevalent among males, with the NEA’s most recent flagship survey showing that 46.9% of women read a novel or short story in 2022, compared to just 27.7% of men.

It is not shocking that plenty of young men — in what I see as an era of conservative, discipline-focused attitudes that dominate many popular male subcultures and online spaces — are aware of this decline in reading. It is also, in the same vein, not at all shocking that many of these young men are looking to push back, to return to the ‘good old days’ of the well-rounded male.

But when these men attempt to refine their lives, to rediscover and reestablish the articulate, well-read man in modern society, what exactly are they being told to read? The answer lies in how that very culture of male self-improvement frames reading: a tool for self-optimization.

The memoirs of motivational speakers, books that promise the secrets behind self-improvement hacks, optimizing productivity, ‘Having a Hard Time Being a Human? Here’s How



TJ Carter | Niner Times

to Get Rich and Jacked in Just Two Months!’ are enticing to male readers. If there’s a self-help bestseller with an author who uses a masculine, give-it-to-you-straight diction along with a catchy title, you’ll likely find one of your male friends — even the most well-meaning and genuine of the lot — seeking it out as an answer to his realization that he does not read enough.

And if, for whatever reason, these books end up being effective on your journey to restoring a healthy reading habit, then I’m all for that. That would mean, I would hope, that you enjoyed the contents of the book itself — whether it was the prose, the information, the author’s perspective, or any combination of these factors — and that you were able to engage with the material and hold your attention as you read.

That’s completely acceptable. If books of this sort are what you like, I believe that’s a beautiful thing. The problem I’ve noticed, however, is that many men who try to pull themselves out of their decade-long reading slumps end up forcing themselves to read what they simply do not enjoy, with some of these books containing brutal spiels on the importance of a firm handshake in job interviews, repetitious passages on speaking more clearly or standing up straighter.

It’s not that there isn’t plenty of advice in these sorts of books that can be constructively applied to your life, that could even improve future relationships or prepare you for obstacles you’ll inevitably face in your adulthood. It’s that a majority of young men will already endure others’ pontificating on these topics as they grow older.

Discipline is a powerful thing. Training your mind and body to obey your own practices, despite all of the screaming reasons that beg you to do otherwise, is an important part of becoming who you want to be. And reading, teaching your attention span to surrender solely and entirely to the words written by an author, is an activity that will require it. If I could advise any young men like myself who want to strive towards being more active as thinkers — men who want to learn how to be more understanding of others and work towards being more familiar with the world around them — it would be that you should approach reading as a reward, rather than a discipline.

There is no quicker way to stick to a habit than to enjoy it. And luckily for all of us, a novel can be one of the most rewarding ways to spend your time. You may not love everything you read — you’ll sit through stories that go in entirely different directions than you would have liked and endure prose you find obnoxious or dull — but you’ll learn something about yourself with

each one.

I remember realizing I wasn’t particularly drawn to some of Stephen King’s famous works. “It” was a drag to me, and I found “Misery” to be underwhelming in the back half. I stared at thousands of five-star reviews and declared to myself, with complete sureness, that I thought they were wrong. Obviously, I’m in the minority there — and while I can recognize the brilliance in King’s storytelling, what mattered was that my takeaway from his books was my own, and no one else’s. I learned something about myself. I was forming my own taste.

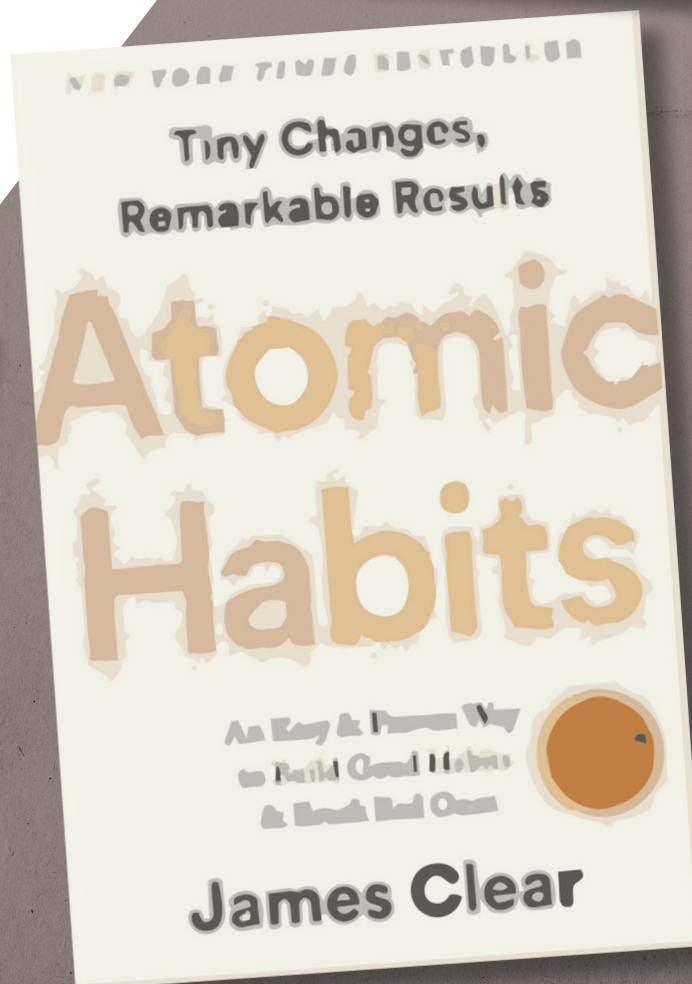
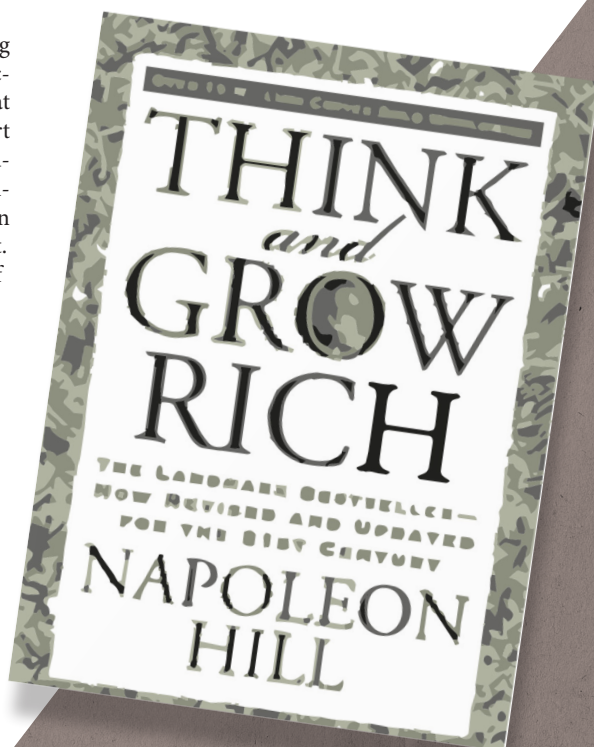
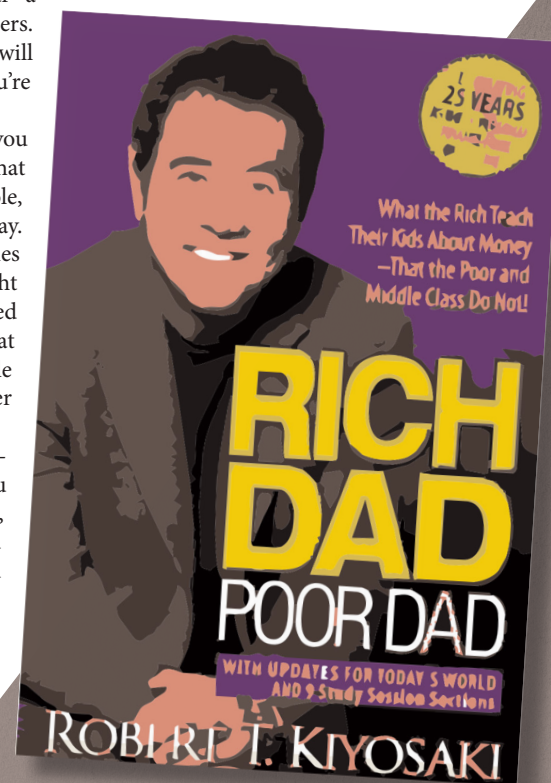
And when — and you must trust me when I use the word when, because I promise you with complete certainty that it will happen — you find a novel that truly grips you, one that you find yourself reaching for at any moment you get to squeeze in a few more pages, you will be rewarded in ways you could not have previously imagined. You’ll see parts of yourself you never thought you’d find outside your own head — moments and characters will cling to your thoughts and shape how you view the people you meet and the experiences you live through, in entirely new ways. Not simply because they’re completely new to you, but often because they’ll resonate with you so deeply it feels as though you’ve welcomed back a part of yourself you’d previously forgotten.

My point is that you’ll be told, in a variety of ways and to varying degrees of effectiveness, the importance of making eye contact with your boss when he speaks to you,

or how standing with a masculine posture might help you appear a more authoritative figure to others. These are things that the world will likely beat into you by the time you’re leaving your twenties.

What they won’t exactly teach you with such haste, however, is what many men, and people as a whole, lack to a frustrating degree today. To quote the legendary writer James Baldwin, “It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive or who had ever been alive.”

The parting word here is empathy. Reading a novel will mold you into a more empathetic person, toward yourself and others. And it is with that empathy that you will be able to approach the rest of your life with a clearer lens than you ever would have before. Is there anything more self-improving than that?





Opinion: Mass surveillance is a big, bad deal

Christa Harris | Staff Writer

This fall semester, UNC Charlotte welcomed over 5,000 first-year students. However, there was no convocation for another new addition: Flock cameras, which are stationed at over 15 locations across campus and surrounding areas.

You may or may not be familiar with these cameras due to the recent pushback they're receiving, both in person and online. They are easily identifiable: They stand on slim, black metal poles with a solar panel and a cylindrical camera that flashes red or purple light when scanning a target. Across multiple states, Flock cameras have been intentionally damaged, vandalized or uprooted by Americans. Many citizens have voiced discomfort with the presence of these devices, including a South Carolina homeowner who found a Flock camera pointed directly into her backyard rather than toward the street.

According to Flock Safety, the corporation that began selling and manufacturing the devices in 2017, their name is intentional. They are called "Flock" cameras because, as seen on Charlotte's campus, there are typically multiple cameras working in close proximity and sharing data. This surveillance data — license plate numbers, vehicle data and travel patterns — is stored in the cloud and shared with multiple law enforcement agencies and customers. While Flock Safety stores the data for a default period of seven days, the receiver

may store and access the data for anywhere from 30 days to over a year.

There is a multitude of reasons why so many Americans oppose the growing, widespread installation of Flock cameras in cities across the country. One such reason is the confirmed misuse of these devices by their primary and intended users: police officers. Per The Washington Post, over 50 officers across various U.S. police departments, including at least two from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, have been charged with or accused of misusing Flock cameras. The actions of these officers range from stalking ex-girlfriends and other people by using the license-plate reading and facial recognition data from the cameras, to tracking their own colleagues to feed information to narcotics dealers and sabotage investigations.

Another reason so many citizens oppose Flock is that traffic cameras and CCTV footage make these devices seem unnecessary. Charlotte has license plate cameras installed in most on-campus parking decks, as well as standard surveillance cameras both inside and outside of academic and recreational buildings. The Popp Martin Student Union has multiple CCTV cameras at the front of the building, yet a Flock camera has been installed directly across the street. Given that these cameras use AI, it's reasonable that

hundreds of millions of Americans are uncomfortable with the possibility that their faces, features and movements being placed into an AI database without prior consent.

Lastly, one can argue that mass surveillance technology is not an indicator of a low-trust society, but a breeding ground for one. Flock Safety states that their devices are intended to prevent crime and aid law enforcement investigations. Yet, Flock cameras have been set up in cities in 49 of the 50 states, with the single exception of Alaska. Despite the corporation's claim, the cameras seem to be installed without considering a particular city or state's crime rate; this fact makes it hard for many to tell how accurate Flock's claim of improving safety actually is. It would be ridiculous to pretend that Charlotte has an extremely low crime rate, but it is not even among the top-ranked cities with the most crime per capita across the state. Crime in Charlotte is also more concentrated around Uptown, Sugar Creek and Beatties Ford than the University area.

Returning to the point, mass surveillance technology, such as Flock cameras, does a disservice to citizens by sensationalizing crime to increase demand for itself. Just last year, Charlotte became a national spectacle after footage of the murder of Iryna Zarutskaya was made public. The issue arises because camera footage is not an accurate representa-

tion of actual crime, especially not for those who are undereducated about crime statistics.

Suppose that a city like Manchester, New Hampshire, has an average of nine murders per year. If eight of those nine murders were recorded and then posted on X or the local nightly news, many would conclude that Manchester is one of the most dangerous cities in the country, despite it being one of the safest. The more dangerous you perceive your city to be, the less you want to go outside — maybe you'll just stay in and watch TV or scroll on your phone to see even more crime videos.

Adding Flock cameras anywhere is not about crime prevention. It is about securing the relationship between humans and technology, particularly with artificial intelligence, for the long run. With the increasing number of professors using and/or suggesting AI as well as the overnight pop-up of Flock cameras, it's clear that this is not necessarily an ideological issue. This is also not a regional issue particular to Charlotte, the state of North Carolina or even the South. Regardless of your ideology, background or hometown, I urge all Americans to consider whether or not the addition of Flock cameras and AI-partnered surveillance treads on your rights.

UNC CHARLOTTE

Opinion: The rebrand is coming sooner than we think

Sean McGuffin | Staff Writer

Megan Khor/Niner Times

UNC Charlotte has been in an identity crisis over the last few decades, transitioning from a small commuter school to the third-largest school in the state, and the journey has been far from smooth. The school we attend today is drastically different from the one attended by generations of alumni before us. Yet, through all the new buildings and record-setting class sizes, one thing remains untouched from the school's early days: the name.

In 1965, Charlotte College officially joined the UNC System and was known from that day forward as "UNC Charlotte." An uninspiring name, but for a small college trying to find its feet, being named a UNC satellite campus gave the school legitimacy at the time. But over time, the school built its own culture. Charlotte has grown to become its own school with its own identity, yet a majority of school branding still acknowledges the mothership — or does it?

The big three-letter eyesore has been discussed by students and alumni for many years. The acronym "UNCC" is almost insulting. For years, rival schools have used the acronym as "Upper Newell Community College" and "UNC Concord" as easy ammo during game days. In 1988, the school dropped any use of the "UNCC" logo and branding, using the new crown design and a wordmark that distinguishes "UNC" and "Charlotte."

In 2000, athletics decided to drop the "UNC" and be known henceforth as "Charlotte Athletics." If you boot up a copy of College Football '27 or an old NCAA Hoops game, you will only ever see the teams referred to as "Charlotte." Yet, at the time, University branding remained with UNC Charlotte.

In 2020, Charlotte made another branding change, with the biggest emphasis being on the "C." Everything would now use the "C" logo. At one point, athletic and academic branding were distinct, but today it's all "C"

all the time. The current logo has been divisive, with some liking the hidden pickaxe in the symbol while others find it bland compared to the previous athletic and school logos. Whether you like the logo or not, it sent a clear message: this isn't just some satellite campus anymore; this is Charlotte's university.

Yet even with our school's growth, we live with the asterisk of being another UNC satellite campus. Those three letters stuck to the name like a silly bumper sticker you put on your car years ago and somehow still can't scrape off. For schools like UNC Greensboro, the name makes sense as they share the city with other schools like North Carolina A&T, Greensboro College and Guilford College. UNCG makes sense because it has to differentiate itself from other colleges in the area.

Yet that challenge does not exist for Charlotte. Yes, Queens University also calls Charlotte home, but a private school of 1,600 students can hardly call itself the definitive university of Charlotte. We are the public university representing the largest city in the Carolinas, yet for years, we have had to differentiate ourselves to outsiders from a school over two hours away. While our school will always remain in the UNC System as a public university for everyone in North Carolina and beyond, the name should embody the city that we call home, not the board of directors that governs our campus.

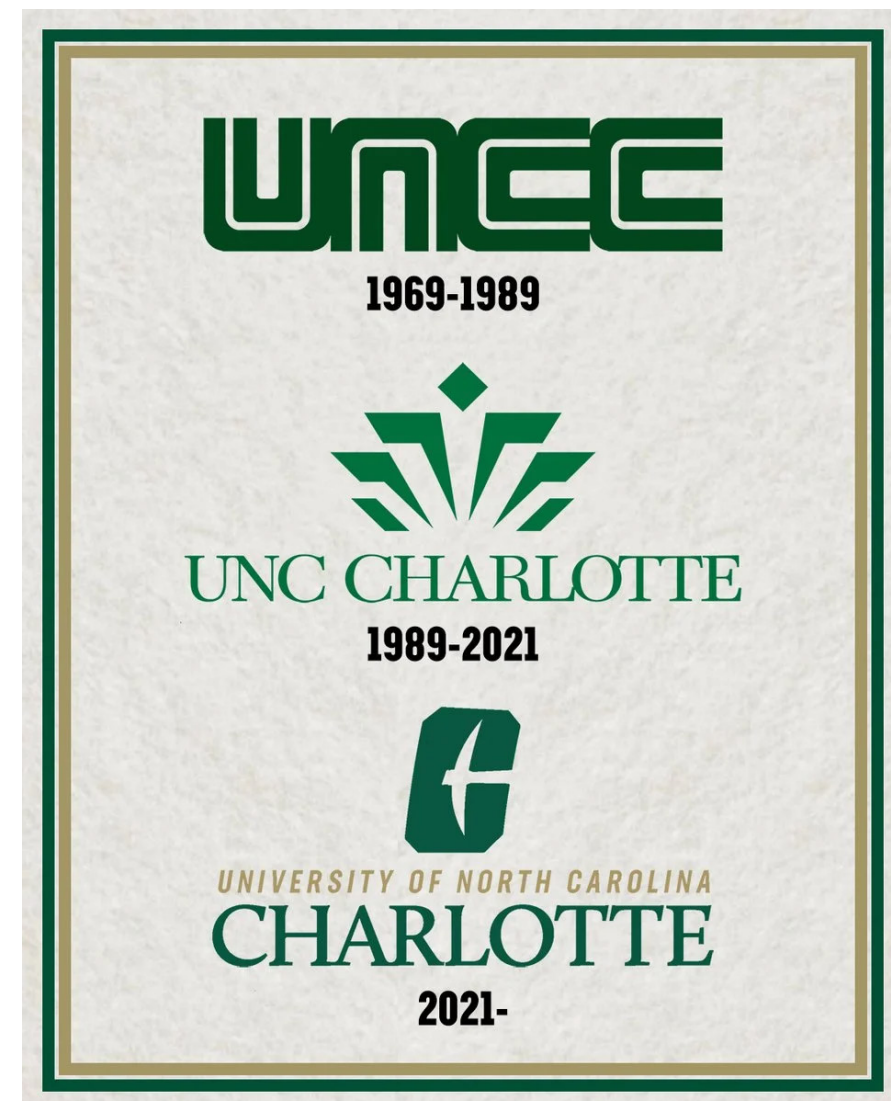
Since the logo change, the school seems more confident branding itself without identifying with the UNC System. Recent plaques commissioned by the school for the newly renamed Cauble Quad use only "Charlotte" as school branding. The same can be said about t-shirts given out to students, websites and social media accounts. It's clear that breaking free from the mothership is not an 'if' but a 'when.' But how much longer does Charlotte have to wait for Independence Day?

It's easier said than done; changing logos and websites is simple compared to secur-

ing approval from the Board of Trustees, the UNC System and the state government. A tall task for a university that seems to be growing at an exponential rate, but a small price to pay for a new era of the University. "Charlotte's stock is rising" is a phrase we have heard on repeat since Kevin White

joined the University as athletic director. It's an inspiring message that even brighter days are on the horizon for our university. But for Charlotte's stock to rise, we just might have to trade in the "UNC."

Courtesy of UNC Charlotte Special Collections



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