

NINERTIMES

Student-driven news since 1947 April 23, 2025

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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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Events to watch for on and off campus

Late Night Breakfast
April 30, 9-11 P.M.
South Village Dining Hall (SoVi)

Anything That Rolls - Group
Campus Bike Ride
April 25, 4-6 P.M.
Light Rail Main Station

2025 COAAPalooza
April 25, 4:30-7:30 P.M.
Arts Quad

2025 Airband
April 25, 5-10 P.M.
Halton Arena

Track & Field vs Charlotte
Invitational
April 25-26, All day
Irwin Belk Track & Field Center

25th Annual Putnam County
Spelling Bee
April 25-27, Times vary
Robinson Hall, Black Box

NOTES FROM THE NEWSROOM: Go outside!

Emsley Jackson | Opinion Editor



Since the dawn of time, humans have known that sunlight equals happiness.

Cavemen and their dinosaur counterparts spent their days blissfully blistering out in the open.

For the ancient Inca, the sun was considered the creator of the whole world.

In the early 1900s, a Nobel Prize was given to Niels Ryberg Finsen for recognizing how sunlight helps cure diseases.

So why did people stop photosynthesizing?

You can blame air conditioning, cell phones, COVID-19 and Ronald Reagan, or you can take strides to spend more time outdoors.

UNC Charlotte is a green oasis amongst the bustling and ever-sprawling metropolis of the city of Charlotte. Take advantage of the green lawns, outdoor seating, tree canopies and hammocks our campus has to offer.

Spring has sprung, after all. Aside from the onslaught of pollen at the onset of the season, spring in North Carolina is a beautiful showcase of life as it should be. Show some appreciation for Mother Nature's tireless efforts these last few weeks of the semester and spend more time in the great outdoors.

Your caveman ancestors would be grunting in approval.

From the Charlotte police logs (April 4 - 18)

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

The following are some incidents in the UNC Charlotte campus police logs from April 4-18, 2025.

April 4 Injured/Ill Subject

Officers responded to an injured individual at the Light Rail Platform, where a dispute led to self-inflicted wounds. One was arrested and trespassed; the other was identified and banned.

April 12 Check Welfare

A resident student requested help to remove a ring. An officer contacted the Fire Department, which successfully cut the ring off. A care report was completed.

April 17 Verbal Confrontation

An employee at the 704 Club reported a student trying to enter and vape. Officers escorted him out and submitted a referral to the Dean's Office.

5 Charlotte students win spring tuition, gain skills and confidence for the future through the Career Center

Emily Schenkel | Staff Writer

Five UNC Charlotte students were awarded scholarships from the Niner Career Challenge Scholarship to cover their spring 2025 tuition through participation in the fourth annual Niner Career Challenge.

Organized by Charlotte's Career Center, the 2025 challenge saw a 45% increase in student participation compared to its first year in 2021.

The 2025 Niner Career Challenge winners and the spring 2025 tuition were third-years Grace Asaad and Madison Silver, fourth-years India Clark and Ranaroath Mey and graduate student Abhilash Pusapally.

Over 3,600 students participated in the Niner Career Challenge. Challenge participants earned points by attending and participating in career-related events across campus. The events were separated into different categories, including career fairs, networking events, career meet-ups, speaker panels, practice interviews, recruiting tables and informational sessions.

Students who participated in 10 or more of the activities under the Niner Career Challenge became eligible for the spring tuition prize of \$3,500. At each event, participants scanned their IDs to track attendance. Though it only took 10 events to be eligible for spring tuition, the winners collectively participated in 314 events.

The five winners were selected based on their accumulated points from attending the most career-related events and activities.

Asaad, Clark, Mey, Pusapally and Silver discovered their victory of the Niner Career Challenge through an email. The five shared a similar feeling of shock with their accomplishment.

In addition to the shock, the winners' excitement revolved mainly around the amount of the scholarship.

"I thought it was a scam when I first got the 'congratulations' email, but I'm so glad I decided to participate. It helped with my anxieties about my tuition," said Asaad.

The winners all appreciated the experience of participating in the challenge and attending various events.

"My favorite part was how easy it was. It wasn't a hassle to join, and it was a zero-pressure environment where the hosts didn't pressure anyone to talk or call on people randomly," said Asaad.

Going through the events, Clark said they also provided a sense of hope for the future of finding a stable career after graduation.

"I loved the large variety of events provided and many that directly addressed the plethora of career readiness questions I had," said Clark. "My confidence in working towards a real career post-graduation was very low at the start of my senior year, but now I've gained more confidence and knowledge about entering the workforce."

Students taking part in the Niner Career Challenge could interact with employers, industry professionals and career advisors, using each as a mentor for their future career goals.

"One of my favorite parts of this journey was connecting with mentors and career advisors who offered guidance tailored to my field of interest. Their insights and encouragement empowered me to take confident steps toward my career in healthcare," said Silver.

The career-related events and activities provided through the challenge were the pathway to winning the tuition, but they were also an incredible learning experience for all students involved.

"Beyond the financial support, the experience provided me with essential career skills that I will carry forward into my future," said Silver. "I learned how to present myself professionally, strengthen my resume and effectively communicate my goals and aspirations."

Asaad expressed how he learned many tips about what employers look for in resumes and cover letters.

"I've learned so much over my time with the Niner Career Challenge that I can apply now and later in the future when I pursue grad school and how to better position myself through negotiations, how best to use LinkedIn, creating resumes and cover letters and overall interpersonal networking," said Asaad. "There were also concepts that I didn't even know I would need to be addressed in these workshops and panels."

This challenge gave students hard skills that they can apply to their future careers and current education and soft skills that they can use throughout their careers, no matter where they end up.

"Participating in the Career Challenge helped me build discipline and develop the habit of consistently showing up. It also helped me overcome the anxiety of selling myself to employers. Before this, I used to feel nervous talking about my skills or experience, but through the different activities and interactions, I gained more confidence in presenting myself professionally," said Pusapally.

This challenge was an incredible chance for students to win spring tuition, but it also served as a learning experience and networking opportunity.

"Overall, the Niner Career Challenge was more than just a competition—it was an enriching experience that equipped me with valuable skills and opportunities. I am truly grateful for the support and resources provided through this initiative, and I hope more students take advantage of such career development programs in the future," said Silver.



Charlotte roadside rally draws hundreds for anti-Trump protest

Davis Cuffe | Editor-In-Chief

Charlotte residents were met with honks and cheers Saturday as roughly 1,000 people came together for a roadside protest against President Donald Trump.

The protest ran from 1-3 p.m. and was the second in two weeks after thousands marched through Charlotte streets on April 5.

On April 19, Charlotteans lined a quarter mile of sidewalk at the intersection of Statesville and Sam Furr roads to further voice their frustration with the Trump administration.

In collaboration with local activist group Indivisible Lake Norman, the protest was organized by the 50501 group, a grassroots organization that has aimed to take a stand against the Trump administration.

Saturday's protest saw a smaller turnout than the one two weeks prior, but organizers said the volume of attendees was still encouraging.

"I think it's very easy to get stuck in doom scroll cycles and just read headline after headline after headline of things that [don't] feel good," said Clancy Rodriguez, an organizer with 50501. "So it definitely encourages me and gives me hope to see people out here."

The hope that Rodriguez described was tangible at the protest, where attendees chanted in support of Democracy and their cause.

Through the constant sound of horns from passing cars, chants like "Tell me what democracy looks like? This is what democracy looks like" sounded up and down Sam Furr road.

In that crowd of attendees was a wide range of ages, all gathered to condemn Trump.

"The old folks are out here because of Medicaid and Medicare," said 79-year-old John Duncan. "I think there's a lot of them that

were at Vietnam demonstrations and saw how effective that was."

"I think Kamala [Harris] is better, and Trump is really bad," said eight-year-old Anna, who preferred not to give her last name and held a sign that read, "No bunny likes Trump."

Anna was not alone in brandishing a sign at the protest; a near majority of attendees held signs airing their grievances with the Trump administration and Elon Musk.

"Don't destroy our democracy," "Stop the coup," "Trump or Jesus? You can't worship both," and "Save Medicare Social Security Medicaid," read signs raised by protestors.

The protestors and their many brazen signs were not met with any counter-protest, yet there was some expressed worry within the crowd about attending.

Many attendees declined to speak with the media and those who did shared their worries about showing up.

"I assumed that a car would flow into the crowd," said 48-year-old Dorothi Shuler.

These concerns likely stem from recent news in which federal agents have detained some who have spoken up against the Trump administration or advocated for Gaza.

On March 25, Tufts University student Rümeysa Öztürk was detained by immigration officials and had her visa terminated after writing an Op-Ed criticizing the Tufts' stance on Israel.

No detainments occurred during the protest's two-hour runtime through 80-degree temperatures. Still, protestors were vocal about the re-

cent detainment of Kilmar Ábrego García, who was detained and later deported in error to El Salvador.

"Today Ábrego García, next it could be you," and "Bring them back! Rümeysa Öztürk Andry Hernandez Romero Kilmar Ábrego García STOP CRUELTY," read signs held by protestors.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the U.S. government should help facilitate his return home, but the Trump administration has not complied, claiming he was rightfully deported and a part of the terrorist gang MS-13.

García has said he is not a member of the gang and has not been convicted of any crime.

Amid growing fears of unjust deportations, the dismantling of vital government programs and the rise of oligarchic control evident along Sam Furr Road, Rodriguez hopes that Saturday's protest and any following will remind people they are not alone in their concerns.

"I hope to show people who aren't at the protest, who may be feeling this way, that they're not alone," said Rodriguez. "One of the most encouraging things is coming to these, and talking people, and hearing them say, 'this is my first [protest],' that's a step in the right direction."

"I think it's very easy to get stuck in doom scroll cycles and just read headline after headline of things that [don't] feel good. So, it definitely encourages me and gives me hope to see people out here."

- Clancy Rodriguez, organizer with 50501



Charlotte students launch campus EMS initiative to cut emergency response times

Praghna Hemadri | Lead Writer

After years of the Charlotte campus community relying on outside sources, two UNC Charlotte students, Nick Maynard and Davida Ogbar, are actively working to establish the first-ever Emergency Medical Service (EMS) team on campus.

Maynard and Ogbar are currently working towards creating a team of Emergency Medical Technician-Basic (EMT-B) trained and certified students to run 911 medical calls around campus. The program aims to operate within the University's campus

and primarily employ student volunteers.

Maynard is a fourth-year biology student who has been working as an EMT in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area for the past five years.

"I have a passion for emergency medicine and have seen the difference helping people quickly makes in health outcomes," said Maynard. "I want to bring what I've had the opportunity to do outside of the University here, on campus, so that more students can experience and pursue the same."

Ogbar is a postgraduate biology student taking pre-medical classes to prepare for medical school. She is also a certified EMT with over a year of experience in the field.

Maynard and Ogbar have decided to initiate this project to reduce response times on campus. Many students have preexisting conditions that often require immediate medical attention. Due to Charlotte's large size as a city, many places, especially the University area, have an influx of 911 calls.

Due to the rising demand, the campus poses a risk of delayed response times. The EMS initiative could also help free up resources, at least medically, for people in the

surrounding areas.

"The primary goal of the campus EMS program is to cut response times and add an extra level of safety while local units are still en route. We estimate that the difference, on average, would be at a minimum of three minutes. In terms of critical medical emergencies such as cardiac arrest/overdose/anaphylaxis, this is a big window," said Maynard.

Ogbar explains that her main inspiration for creating the club is to help her mother, who has had multiple heart attacks and strokes, receive medical attention in the event that she has a crisis whilst on campus.

"Working at the fire station with Nick, I saw firsthand the impact of timely care on patient outcomes for cardiac events," said Ogbar. "It demonstrated the risk tangibly in ways most don't experience firsthand."

Charlotte is a growing campus with over 31,000 students on 1,000 acres, and statistics show that UNC Charlotte contributes about 600 emergency medical calls per year. Charlotte also has two local fire stations that take about 10,000 calls combined each year. This adds up to about 27 calls per day, sometimes even more.

Jace Edgerton, the current Student Government Association's Speaker Pro Tempore, will present on April 24 during a General Assembly to persuade faculty that students need this initiative. Ahead of this

presentation, the EMS initiative have been actively campaigning around campus.

"We had 26 patients last year who were transported mid to high priority; these are patients that could have undoubtedly benefited from a faster response time. Each day we don't have this program, the risk of these events compounds," said Maynard.

One key component of this program is providing students and faculty with the necessary medical care within three minutes, compared to the seven-minute average in Mecklenburg County.

This plan could also provide more experience to pre-healthcare students seeking hands-on experience, especially since pre-health students benefit from resources like this at universities such as UNC-Chapel Hill, Western Carolina University, Duke University and more.

"This initiative would also establish an integrated opportunity for pre-health students who already serve in other counties to gain clinical experience on campus," said Ogbar. "Clinical experience is a mandatory part of post-grad medical applications, and students graduating from [Charlotte] could do so with a competitive edge and more real-world experience."

This initiative plans to coordinate with the local EMS and campus dispatch through the Emergency Services departments. It also plans to establish an EMT certification program on campus in coordination with the Applied Physiology and Health Department and Central Piedmont Community College.

"The goal is easy accessibility and conformity to most students' busy schedules. With this initiative, students could spend one semester getting certified, the next gaining experience as a probationary member and the one after running medical calls as a lead EMT," said Maynard.

Currently, the initiative plans to start as a non-transporting 911 service, but they would love to gain transport capacity as more volunteers and supporters step forward.

"This is a legacy program that will outlive our tenure as students. It will be an integrated service that will provide campus safeguards for years to come," said Ogbar.

Due to the resolution and the initiative being fairly new, the University has provided a statement to clear up any confusion regarding the organization's officiality.

"The group could be in the early organizing stages of forming before completing the new organization registration form," wrote the University.



Courtesy of Student EMS Initiative
Ivory Galloway/Niner Times



Courtesy of Charlotte Ballet

Shining the spotlight on the dedicated women of the Charlotte Ballet

Lauren Simendinger | Staff Writer

It takes a lot of work to make something beautiful. Associate Professor Delia Neil, second-year student Melody Shanahan and professional dancer Karsen Gresham understand this and use it to motivate them.

Neil is the current advisor and director of the Charlotte Ballet certificate program, as well as the Dean of Academic Affairs for the College of Arts + Architecture (CoA+A). She has served as director and advisor of the certificate program for 10 years.

Neil was first drawn to UNC Charlotte after suffering an injury while living in New York City. A friend knew that one of the ballet instructors at Charlotte had resigned and told Neil about the open position, asking her to apply.

"It was a good transition for me, dealing with an injury, and I grew up in Huntersville, so I could stay with my mother," said Neil.

As for her Charlotte Ballet work, that was a lot more casual. Neil felt it was logical for her to step into the position as Sybil Huskey, the professor she replaced, had developed the program.

The Charlotte Ballet certificate program is a partnership with UNC Charlotte's Department of Dance. It involves two courses totaling six credit hours, with students receiving their professional training certificate in dance upon completion. Students in the program receive technical ballet training and have the opportunity to perform in the dance department's fall and spring concerts.

While Neil prefers students to be dance majors, anyone can audition for Charlotte Ballet's Certificate Program. Auditions are with Charlotte Ballet, and they make the final call on who gets in.

"To get in the certificate program, you have to be an advanced dancer and have professional training prior to coming," said Neil. "So it's nice to work with students that are very talented in ballet."

As a professional dancer and choreographer herself, Neil knows all about the work the dancers put in. She reaches out to students she knows can handle it.

"These students that are in the program are used to training six days a week and doing ballet. It's important because they have a love for it," said Neil. "Some of them may want to go ahead and dance in small regional companies but also want to get a degree. The majority of all our certificate students double major as well."

One of those dedicated students is Shanahan, a second-year student at Charlotte and a student in Charlotte Ballet's Certificate Program. She is earning her bachelor's degree in criminal justice while also pursuing a bachelor's in applied dance and the certificate program. Balancing her dance work and her studies is a struggle, but Shanahan makes it work.

"I have really long breaks, about two or three hours. And during that time, I would do my homework, do everything I can, and maybe take a nap in between," said Shanahan. "It's also important to talk to my advisors as well and have conversations with my teachers because they're also the ones who get me gigs and stuff. It's hard, but once you get used to it, it's manageable."

On Mondays and Wednesdays from 6:15 to 8:30 p.m. and Saturdays from 9:30 to 11 a.m., Shanahan attends class at the Charlotte Ballet. Dancers warm up before moving on to the barre, stretching and center work. After ballet, they do pointe work for the rest of the night.

Shanahan first learned about Charlotte Ballet's certificate program from her fellow dancers in class at UNC Charlotte. She auditioned and soon got in. Shanahan knew how valuable the extra knowledge and experience she gained in the program would be for her.

"I'm really thankful that I'm in that program because it's important to consistently take classes," said Shanahan. "I don't want to lose my technique while studying both [dance and criminal justice] for school. I'm also going to be certified with the company itself. It's with a lot of good dancers and professional dancers, and if I take that to my advantage, I can use it to apply to my choreography or become a teacher, make my own studio."

Shanahan first started ballet at 10 years old. Her first class was with Charlotte Ballet's Reach Scholarship Program, which provides free access to beginner-level dance classes. Pursuing it professionally was a risk, but she was willing to take it.

"Having the technique of ballet will help you improve with other genres," said Shanahan. "It's really important to have that strength and stability that ballet has. I wanted to get that technique, and once I started taking it, I fell in love with it, and I wanted to pursue that as a career."

Ballet is not the only dance Shanahan does. She also dances folklórico, a Mexican dance style that emphasizes Mexican folk culture. It differs from ballet as folklórico dancers wear flowing, colorful dresses as opposed to tutus and shoes with needles on them to make sound.

She does folklórico outside of school, learning from teachers online. Shanahan also dances with folklórico groups in Greensboro, N.C., including one called Luz de mi Tierra, which her friend runs.

Shanahan hopes to start her own folklórico group in Charlotte. She blends her two favorite styles together in her performances by wearing a folklórico costume while doing pointe. Regarding ballet, Shanahan recommends that every dancer at UNC Charlotte pursue Charlotte Ballet's Certificate Program.

"The dancers there are so talented, and the teachers there are amazing," said Shanahan. "Your technique will grow pretty quickly as I have, and the timing is fine too. You also get to meet new people."

Plenty of other opportunities exist for dancers to connect with Charlotte Ballet, even if they are not studying dance in school. Gresham, who had recently joined her first company, turned down an acceptance from The Juilliard School to continue working with Charlotte Ballet.

"I don't necessarily say that I regret it [not attending Juilliard] because I'm so here, and I love everything that I'm doing with this company," said Gresham. "Sometimes I imagine what would have happened if I did do that [attending Juilliard]. But also, at the same time, I was joining my dream company."

Gresham, a Charlotte native, has pretty much lived her whole life in the Charlotte Ballet studio. Growing up, she did "The Nutcracker" with the

company several times. At 10, she decided to join the Charlotte Ballet Academy.

She danced her way through the ranks until she reached Ballet 5, the last level before dancers could join the pre-professional division. Gresham was invited to do that, and she kept going further from there.

"I just got called into [Chris Stuart, interim Artistic Director]'s office one day, and he offered me a contract for the second company, and of course I was elated," said Gresham.

It is easy to feel Gresham's love and passion for her company when talking to her. Her Instagram page is filled with pictures capturing her time with the Charlotte Ballet, and she is overflowing with praise for them.

"The repertoire that we do here is second to none," said Gresham. "We get incredible choreographers and stage runners coming in that set work on us that not many companies in the U.S. get to do. The environment of the dancers is something that I don't hear about or see in many other places. We're all so close, and it's like a huge family for us."

Her passion extends beyond just her company but to the art form itself. She rehearses all day, focusing on the joy ballet gives her and others.

As part of Charlotte Ballet's In-School outreach programs, Gresham and other dancers perform shows for the students in local schools. It means a lot to her to connect with the kids through dance.

"I think performing for kids sometimes feels more special just because I remember being there and watching this, and it makes an impact on me," said Gresham.

Love is not the only thing guiding Gresham down this path. She is a picture of hard work and dedication.

"I watched videos for inspiration," said Gresham. "I tried to learn from all of my peers. I tried to soak in every bit of information my teachers gave me. They always told me that it's better to be a sponge. You just soak everything up."

In the future, Gresham wants to keep dancing as long as she can. When her body needs her to stop, she

would like to teach dance, either as a rehearsal director or choreographer. She has not ruled out nursing, either.

In the meantime, audiences can see her in Charlotte Ballet's production of "Carmen" from May 2-11, 2025. Tickets are on sale now. Shanahan and Neil's work is featured in UNC Charlotte's fall and spring dance concerts, as well as around the Charlotte area.

These women are not the only talented ballerinas in Charlotte, but they are certainly among the most committed to their craft.



Alaya Holmes models excellence while balancing multiple creative pursuits

Kendall Maye | Arts & Culture Editor

In college, figuring out what to study can be a difficult decision. Some students are not sure until they explore what each major has to offer, while some students have so many passions that they want to pursue them all once. That is where fourth-year student and runway model Alaya Holmes comes in.

Majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies with a concentration in Film and Media Production,

Holmes is an ambitious individual who is preparing to change the world, one creative project at a time.

She has always been interested in the performing arts, so it was natural for her to major in theatre upon arriving at Charlotte. However, once the University added a film major, she switched to that because she enjoys being behind the scenes as much as she enjoys being on stage,

especially after having a positive experience as an assistant director in high school.

"I decided to go ahead and switch because I found so much interest in the creative process when it came to creating films with storyboarding, script writing and directing. I love all of that," said Holmes.

While originally from Georgia, Holmes had her sights set on attending a college away from home, like Clemson University. However, while touring schools in the Carolinas, she happened to discover UNC Charlotte off a highway exit during the trip.

Exhausted by the summer heat, she did not initially want to explore the school. After her mom encouraged her to check it out, she instantly fell in love with the campus. She also became drawn to its diversity and proximity to the city.

"They ended up having so many more opportunities and different avenues that I could be interested in, so I decided that I was just going to apply," said Holmes. "It became my dream school. I applied, and I got in. I guess it was fate because I didn't plan on going here."

Who would have thought such a spontaneous decision would change her life?

One day, during her first year, Holmes was sitting outside the Popp-Martin Student Union when another student approached her and suggested that she become a model.

This student was also modeling and got Holmes in contact with some photographers to do a fun shoot together and get more experience on camera.

From there, the kind stranger also got Holmes into a local designer's fashion show in Charlotte, allowing her career to take off in ways she never thought possible.

While balancing school and other responsibilities, Holmes has worked hard to build up her resumé and participate in many events. She is grateful for all the opportunities she has had to work with various designers, photographers, and other models.

Since then, Holmes has walked in New York, Paris and Los Angeles Fashion Weeks. She began with New York Fashion Week after a brand noticed her during her third year of college, an experience she will always cherish.

"It felt like it was my purpose, my destiny falling into place," said Holmes.

Although the modeling industry can be a glamorous profession, and Holmes is passion-

ate about being involved in it, she has faced her fair share of challenges.

She initially began modeling when she was younger but took a 10-year hiatus due to the insecurities she was experiencing.

"The industry is very focused on appearance and looks, so of course, that adds some insecurity at times," said Holmes. "My body was changing, and life was just 'life-ing.' It deterred me from doing it because my confidence was shot."

During the pandemic, she began getting in front of the camera again on her own. Pursuing this creative hobby independently gave her the empowerment to get back into it; this time, she was determined not to let anything stop her and not to care what others thought of her.

Even when she feels nervous about doing shows now, she uses that energy and anticipation to motivate herself. Her background in dance and theatre has helped her feel more comfortable on stage.

"Of course, there were doubts, like when I was about to go on stage," said Holmes. "There are pre-show jitters, but it's more like anxious adrenaline than it is fear. The crowds aren't really what scared me. I think it was just being perceived by other people in a beauty standard kind of way."

Being in such a competitive environment can lead to lots of comparisons. Still, Holmes learned to combat her impostor syndrome during her first New York Fashion Week by changing her perspective.

"The competition is insane when you're in rooms with people who are so beautiful and tall," said Holmes. "[I'm thinking], 'You guys are so pretty. What's going on? Why am I here?'" It adds a bit of fear and intimidation, but at the same time, I'm in the same room as them, so that means they're probably thinking the same thing about me."

Modeling has also helped her deal with rejection. Now, she takes a "no" as a redirection in her career.

"There's going to be a lot of rejection in this industry," said Holmes. "We're all competing for the same parts, so it's challenging to stay positive in situations like that. You have to know that a 'no' to you specifically just means you may not have their height requirements. That doesn't mean you're not pretty or you're not worth it."

She tries to focus on her personality instead of worrying about looks, which has helped her significantly in her confidence journey. While putting her mind to such ambitious endeavors, she has no doubt that she can succeed since she keeps proving it to herself every time.

"I don't feel like people have doubted me be-



Courtesy of Alaya Holmes

cause whatever I say I'm going to do, I end up doing it," said Holmes. "There's not much doubt even in myself because I've been wanting to do it for so long."

Despite the pressures of competition, Holmes strives to create a networking opportunity out of each experience, also making new friends with other models along the way.

This camaraderie creates a sense of normalcy amongst the chaos of being backstage before a show. She compares it to the finale episodes of "America's Next Top Model" in that there is a lot of waiting around while makeup and hair artists quickly prepare models to walk the runway.

"I enjoy the chaos of it all. I don't really try to keep myself calm because I know what I'm there for, and I'm just rolling with the punches throughout the day. I love it," said Holmes.

While she stays busy building her fashion repertoire, Holmes still wants to continue pursuing a career in the film industry. She also wants to change the game through innovative concepts and storytelling by redefining genres, such as psychological thrillers.

"I want to definitely change the industry standard, and I can't do that if I'm not pushing myself to the limit," said Holmes.

Whether through the outfits she wears on the runway or the scripts she writes for her films, Holmes wants to tell stories that move people and offer escapism to make people feel safe.

"I hope to tell stories that make people feel something again, especially in a world where we become so desensitized to everything that's happening because there's so much happening all the time," said Holmes.

She also wants to ensure that those stories reach the right audience, which is why she plans to pursue her master's degree in marketing this year at New York University.

Holmes remains an active student who enjoys participating in many extracurricular activities. She is the creative relations director of the Association of Black Entrepreneurs and Creators (ABEC), the former president of the MOVE Dance Alliance, a runway consultant for Majestic Models and previously worked as a model for Midas Magazine.

How does Holmes balance everything? She is not sure. All she knows is that she is so passion-

ate about her goals that she will do anything to achieve them.

"I have no idea how I was doing all that," said Holmes. "I think it's just because I wanted it so bad that it didn't matter how much I had to do to make sure I did it; I was going to do it."

Holmes is sure about why she continues to seek success. She finds great purpose in being a woman of color in creative industries where there are not many. She strives to create that representation to inspire others, showing that they can do it, too.

She is also motivated by those who are no longer with her. After losing three grandparents and an aunt she was close with, Holmes is more determined than ever to honor them with her work and keep going.

"Those people were so connected to my artistic journey because they were very artistic people," said Holmes. "They are the ones who got me into that, and their legacy runs through me. So, waking up every day and choosing this career, I'm choosing to keep their message alive. I want to make sure I can do that for other people, too."

Kaelyn Francois is a fourth-year student and friend of Holmes who admires her creative process.

"I often tell Alaya that my life would not be the same if I hadn't met her, and I mean that in the most genuine sense," said Francois. "The way she carries herself and the way she is able to draw inspiration from any and everything truly inspires me every day to do my best."

With so many hobbies and career goals, it can be hard to pick one to concentrate on. However, Holmes does not plan on compromising. Instead, she will continue to pursue all of them, no matter what.

"I want people to know I existed, I've been here and I'm going to make an impact in some way," said Holmes. "I'm just getting started, so I feel like that impact I want to make is just knowing that I made people feel something again, reawakening that sense of inspiration or creativity."



“I’m just getting started, so I feel like that impact I want to make is just knowing that I made people feel something again, reawakening that sense of inspiration or creativity.”

- Alaya Holmes, fourth-year student

Letter from the Editor: New protections for sources and staff

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

In reaction to recent events, we have altered our policies regarding anonymity and redactions to protect sources and authors further.

These changes include a 'no questions asked' approach to sources or interviewees who request anonymity out of fear of punishment from the federal government.

Anonymity in other cases will continue to be subject to approval by the Niner Times' editor-in-chief.

In alignment with this, we have updated our redactions policy to accommodate anyone with similar fears.

Any individuals who have had their names mentioned in an article that they believe could make them a target by the federal government can have it changed to be anonymous or removed at their request.

Requests for redactions or alterations to an individual's attribution in any Niner Times content can be sent to the Niner Times' editor-in-chief at editor@ninertimes.com.

Policy changes were also made to protect Niner Times staffers regarding anonymous authorship and alterations to previously published works.

Any Niner Times staffer who wishes to remain anonymous in their work may do so upon approval by the Niner Times' editor-in-chief.

Staffers who wish to be anonymous can go by a surname of their choosing or "Niner Times Staffer."

Niner Times staffers, former or current, may request alterations to their past bylines subject to approval from the Niner Times' editor-in-chief. In alignment with the policies explained above, any individual who would like their byline altered due to fears of punishment from the federal government will be faced with a 'no-questions-asked' attitude in approving their request.

All requests for alterations to an individual's byline in any Niner Times content can be sent to the Niner Times' editor-in-chief at editor@ninertimes.com.

Niner Times policies can be found on our website.

These policy changes come in reaction to local and national events and are in alignment with other college media that have made similar changes.

On March 25, Tufts University doctoral student Rümeysa Öztürk, a Turkish national, was detained by immigration officials and had her visa terminated. This is reportedly due to her co-authoring an opinion piece in the Tufts Daily student newspaper in 2024 criticizing the University's stance on Israel.

Following, on April 9, earlier this week, UNC Charlotte fell in line among a growing list of universities nationwide that have had international student visas terminated. In the case of UNC Charlotte, we saw six of our classmates, roommates, lab partners or friends have their visas and Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) records terminated, subjecting them to deportation.

As a student journalist on UNC Charlotte's campus, I find these actions to be deeply troubling, especially when they appear to aim to stifle free speech. Similarly, as journalists, we must report ethically and minimize our harm in doing so. Right now, for us, that means providing anonymity when needed and with more leniency.

Still, while our policies have changed, our reporting has not and will not.

We will continue to provide timely and accurate updates on any campus happenings with a close eye out for further visa terminations or related matters.

If you have any questions about these policy changes, do not hesitate to reach out to us at editor@ninertimes.com. If you have any information on visa terminations or anything else you would like us to know in relation to current happenings, please do not hesitate to use the anonymous tip line on our website.

Opinion: College students are agents of change

Tairen Fenhoff | Staff Writer

Since President Donald Trump's inauguration in January, one of his main targets has been education. Although the attack is obvious, from cutting funding for the Department of Education to revoking the visas of international students, many of us are asking why he seems to be so intent on it.

Although the attack is disguised as a 'dismantling of bureaucracy,' the bureaucracy in question is one of the most beneficial uses of our tax money in our nation. The system, like any other, has its issues, but the funding cuts the administration is implementing will not help them. If the funding is helping us and has bipartisan support, why are they cutting it?

Because opinions start with education. The history we are taught, the experiences we undergo and the literature we read all shape our view of the world and, thus, the government. As much as our leaders attempt to conform public opinion to their will, critical thinking skills make controlling a population a much more difficult feat.

So, they turn to controlling the input through book bans, fabricated news articles and rewriting history themselves. By controlling the past, they control the present.

We know they want to regulate history, but what does that have to do with campus life? The attack on the university campuses still seems unprecedented.

The answer to this question concerns the role of college students as agents of change in society. Historically, higher education has been targeted

by dictators in their pursuit of power. Although often underestimated, college students are loud about their beliefs and their pursuit of truth. Civil rights, activism and the college campus are inextricably intertwined.

Take Sophie Scholl, for example. In 1942, at the height of the Nazi dictatorship, Scholl was a key member of a Nazi resistance group called the White Rose. During her time at her university in Germany, she and her comrades passed out pamphlets warning of the Nazi regime and the horrors occurring because of it.

She and her companions had a broad reach within their community. In total, the group created six pamphlets, which were initially distributed through mail to professors, friends and fellow students. After that, the group widened their scope to the university itself, where they left Nazi counter-propaganda all across their campus.

Through the distribution of these pamphlets, the White Rose encouraged thousands of German households to resist, sabotage and destroy any piece of the Nazi machine that they could. They garnered an extensive web of support not only on their campus but throughout their country as well.

Supporters of the group all across Germany helped the members gather paper and other resources necessary for their endeavors. They also helped with the distribution of the pamphlets, disguising the location of the White Rose from the Nazi regime.

In the group's final pamphlet, which they dis-

tributed through flyers at their university, the group stated, "Students! The German people look to us! The responsibility is ours." The group knew the power of their youth, and they used that power to foster dissent not only on their campus but eventually across Europe.

After the Nazi regime put all known members of the White Rose to death, other rebels managed to smuggle the group's final pamphlet into the United Kingdom. The Allies continued to distribute these works by dropping more pamphlets from planes over Germany.

Even at the time of her death, the 21-year-old Scholl had no regrets. Before her execution by the Nazis, she stated, "I am (...) of the opinion that I did the best that I could do for my nation. I, therefore, do not regret my conduct and will bear the consequences that result from my conduct."

The story of the White Rose is a tragic one, but there is a lesson to be gleaned from it. Although we often blame complacency on youth, the world looks to college students to foster change in society. It is not right for us to sit by when rights are revoked, and injustice reigns.

It is no coincidence that our educational system is a continual topic of debate, and it will continue to be one as long as individuals seek to serve themselves through our governmental system. However, the actions of university students have power, and it is our responsibility to use it. College students have a duty to speak up for what is right and dispose of what is not.



Opinion: It is not extra to give



Rachel Johnson | Lead Writer

As predictable as the bold letters on course syllabi stating that “no extra credit is given” are, the palatability of the statement never rises. Despite numerous college courses hinging on four to six total grades for the semester, extra credit opportunities remain elusive at the undergraduate level.

While extra credit may seem unnecessary for

those studying at the collegiate level, the provision of opportunities to boost a course grade could reduce student anxiety and expand exposure to enriching educational material beyond what a curriculum usually entails.

Inclusions of extra credit in college are often dismissed due to the heightened performance expectations professors have for students. Moreover, professors also seek to uphold rigorous environments where accurate reflections of effort and comprehension can be reflected equally and fairly through grade outcomes.

These notions are understandable, yet the provision of extra credit would not be a deterrent to the results of either outcome. Extra credit can be an opportunity to provide students with ample educational enrichment and networking while tapping into creative realms that are typically excluded from standard lesson plans.

From community service to attendance at exciting conferences or cultural events, extra credit can be the impetus students need to get involved in their communities and expand their intellectual scope. Providing extra credit for attendance and reflection on events occurring around campus that correlate to the course at hand is a great way to foster student support and involvement.

At UNC Charlotte, many students themselves host or participate in exciting academic or artistic presentations that pertain to the content taught in classes of all subjects. Crafting extra credit opportunities around these events is an amazing way to convey the relevancy and realistic nature of course material while supporting speakers and presenters from near and far.

Extra credit opportunities also aid in alleviating student stress by catering to the strengths and weaknesses of certain individuals in the classroom. If a class only contains five or six grades for the semester or heavily weights certain grade categories over others, students whose strengths do not lie in the category provided may feel pessimistic.

Considering that up to 83.3% of stu-

dents feel levels of extreme anxiety before taking tests and 38% believe essay writing is the most stressful aspect of college according to medical studies, including extra credit options that accommodate all students promotes better mental health outcomes.

“One of my classes contains three tests and a participation grade. If I don’t do well on one of the tests, I could fail the class entirely,” said a first-year architecture major. “It’s especially frustrating since it is an elective credit that is not related to my major. I prefer writing essays over taking tests, especially tests that are difficult and require a lot of memorization. Extra credit would be an anxiety-reliever and help out students who are stronger at other things, such as essay writing.”

Extra credit does not have to be frequent or excessive; even one opportunity a semester is a game-changer for many students. Attending events for extra credit can also open doors to connections to future career endeavors, academic collaborations and more. Providing students with additional chances to boost a grade through creative mediums can leave an impact that could span beyond a singular score.

No matter how well a student is doing in a class, the provision of extra credit is never a detriment. Extra credit opportunities are reassuring gestures that remind students how important their current grades and future academic and vocational pursuits are. Despite having the word ‘extra’ in the phrase, extra credit is an important inclusion to a balanced academic experience.



Blaise Uy/Niner Times

Opinion: North Carolina Republicans are threatening the sanctity of our elections

Noah Hughey | Lead Writer

Appeals Judge Jefferson Griffin has fought tooth and nail for months to contest the results of the North Carolina Supreme Court election, which he is losing by over 700 votes. Statewide, Republican allies have helped him, turning our state into a testing ground for election manipulation that, if affirmed, will set a dangerous national precedent.

In early April, a three-judge panel ruled in favor of Griffin's contest of well over 60,000 ballots, requiring each and every one to submit proof of ID in about two weeks, lest their vote be disqualified from the count. Last weekend, the Board of Elections narrowed that amount significantly to just 1,675 votes.

Some judicial conservatives may squirm at the insistence that a court upholding Jefferson's request is some kind of same-party buddying. But this kind of legal challenge does not simply drop out of thin air. With the example set by President Donald Trump, who challenged his 2020 election loss, denying his defeat to this day, Griffin assumes he has the right to question absentee and military votes against him for a seat in the state's highest judicial office.

But should he get what he wants, and these votes be overturned, the example it will set will be disastrous. It will have rippling effects across the country, reaffirming the illusion of many unpopular Republican candidates that they can simply force their way into office by denying the legality of votes against them.

A culture of authoritarianism is already brewing in the United States under the second Trump administration and the green light Griffin's potential victory will give to other Republicans will also reinforce the ability of bodies like the North Carolina Supreme Court to act not as a check on other offices, but an enforcing body of the ideological uniformity of a politically homogenous state.

The idea that judges and justices function extraneously to contemporary political ideology is absurd, especially in today's heightened political climate. The ideology of a judge may function in a systematically different way from a politician or an activist, but on contentious issues such as abortion, affirmative action and capital punishment, judges are found to rule differently in ways that are consistent with a political-ideological background.

Under North Carolina's existing Supreme Court, elected in 2022, we have seen a version of this play out. In 2023, the court overruled a previous decision that made partisan gerrymandering illegal, allowing politicians to draw obtuse

districts that strengthen the votes of their supporters and weaken those of their opponents. Their logic seems sound on a first listen: "There is no judicially manageable standard by which to adjudicate partisan gerrymandering claims. Courts are not intended to meddle in policy matters."

But when you consider that the legislature the court was throwing this power back to was overwhelmingly controlled by Republicans, who carried 72 House seats to the Democrats' 48 in 2023 and 30 Senate seats to 20, dots begin to connect that cannot be simply washed away as mere coincidence.

The idea that this is all happenstance and does not explicitly help Republicans build a trifecta of control based on partisan redistricting would be not just wrong but ridiculous.

Jefferson Griffin cannot win the associate justice race on the back of overturning votes. This dangerous standard, first set by a defiant Trump five years ago, cannot reverberate across time to empower our current authoritarian trend in America. When you lose, lose gracefully and get to work to serve your community better in order to earn their trust.

It is a growing pain to lose an election, no doubt. But to insist that

you cannot, that some law of nature demands you hold office by virtue of your righteousness, that votes against you that you cannot meticulously watch in person are illegitimate, is not proper decorum, nor is it democratic. Better luck next time.



Courtesy of Common Cause
Courtesy of NC Newsline

Opinion: UNC Charlotte has a construction problem

Megan Bentley/Niner Times

Lauren Simendinger | Staff Writer

Everywhere you look, something is under construction at UNC Charlotte. While renovations will improve the campus once finished, right now, they are just disturbing classes while causing a lack of accessibility and common areas.

Currently, the upper level of Prospector, the Dalton Tower of J. Murrey Atkins Library, Friday, Cameron and the Cone Center are under construction.

The Dalton Tower's elevators are being replaced to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the fire and smoke systems and bathrooms are also being upgraded.

Prospector's upper level is being remodeled for new dining options and a "fresh new look," while Cameron is being renovated to give the chemistry department more room. Construction in Cameron greatly affects the building's accessibility.

Only the first floor is available for students to use, which means there is only one real entrance for them. That entrance requires them to either navigate around construction equipment, which is often active or use a makeshift metal ramp. This is already dangerous for students, but disabled students are even more affected. The ramp is just barely wide enough for wheelchairs, so users often have to wait or ask for people to move out of the way to avoid collision.

Sidewalk traffic is not the only disruption. Road traffic is also negatively affected by the construction. Charlotte already has a commuter problem, but now people also have to navigate the construction crews and trucks, causing major traffic jams.

The construction actively disturbs classes. While most of the work goes on after hours in the library, drilling and banging can often be heard in Cameron during class, disrupting both

students and teachers.

Navigating this disturbance can be frustrating and could give people a negative view of the campus. They come to school to learn and enjoy the campus, not listen to construction all day. This forces them to find other places to get their work done, which has also become a struggle.

Another problem caused by the construction is students' lack of common areas. With Atkins and Prospector only at roughly 50% capacity, students are much more limited in places to use. While there may be plenty of outdoor space available, those who want to hang out inside struggle, especially with unpredictable weather.

"As a commuter, I sort of lose space [on] campus," said first-year student Austin Currie. "I typically hang around campus for about 8-10 hours a day, and the library gets very crowded."

Students are forced into already busy spaces, adding to the issues of noise level and general

accessibility. There is less opportunity for both studying and leisure time. Incoming students also miss out on opportunities as places they were excited to explore are now off-limits.

"I was excited to see the Atkins towers but was sad to find out they were shut down until next year. I heard the view up there is nice and would like to check it out whenever it reopens," said first-year student Shradha Rout.

Charlotte is an ever-growing campus, and construction projects are necessary to make sure every student is accommodated. Charlotte needs construction, but it also needs to work around its students, especially during the school year.

Trying to schedule more work during the summer or spacing it out so only one or two renovations are done during the school year could be better options. Students deserve a safe, accessible and calm environment to learn in, and sometimes, construction is not the answer.

Niner's Comics: Disruptive Tours

Jasmine Taliaferro | Staff Illustrator



How two players transformed Charlotte club field hockey into a culture of grit and growth

Kelli Blackburn | Sports Editor

From just two players in 2021 to a spot in the 2025 National Field Hockey League Spring Tournament, Charlotte club field hockey's rise has been nothing short of remarkable.

After struggling to rebuild interest due to COVID-19 restrictions, Charlotte field hockey evolved to full competition in the 2024-2025 academic year. That season marked the team's first complete competitive slate, participating in both fall and spring tournaments.

With a group of 20 players, Charlotte climbed to a national ranking of No. 37, earning a spot in the National Tournament held in Virginia Beach, Va., from April 11-12. The 49ers finished with a 2-2 tournament record, taking victories over the University of Connecticut (UConn) and the University of Richmond.

This success did not happen overnight—it was built on grit, community and countless hours of hard work. And the team is only just getting started.

One of the key students behind Charlotte's rebirth has been with the team since 2021. That student is club founder and President Emma Palmer, a Charlotte native and fourth-year student.

She had not even picked up a field hockey stick until middle school when a friend encouraged her to try out for a nearby club team. Curious, Palmer gave it a shot, joining an indoor team—and quickly fell in love with the sport.

As her passion grew, Palmer discovered the club team at Charlotte through Instagram. Wanting to find a sense of community, she joined the team's GroupMe chat—just as two major challenges were unfolding. Lingering effects of post-COVID regulations were still holding back many club sports, and the then-team president had broken her foot and decided to step down.

That was when Palmer was presented with an opportunity, encouraged by a familiar face—and ran with it.

"Our faculty advisor, [Abbey Rose], was one of my assistant coaches in high school, and she was like, 'Oh my gosh, you should just be president. You're a go-getter; you would be good at it,'" said Palmer. "So, I became president and said 'We'll be out there [to practice at] this time.'"

At the first practice of the club's new era, only one player showed up—Jette Trumbauer. She quickly became Palmer's right hand as vice president and, eventually, one of her closest friends.

Trumbauer's path to club field hockey at Charlotte looked different. A New Jersey native and second-year student, she transferred from Belmont Abbey College, where she originally played Division II field hockey.

But her plans at Belmont Abbey did not pan out as hoped. When she transferred to Charlotte, Trumbauer thought her field hockey days were behind her—until she stumbled upon the club team and reignited her love for the game.

Together, Palmer and Trumbauer began rebuilding in 2022, promoting the team at campus events like Rec Fest. Interest began to grow, but they still did not have enough players for full 11-on-11 matches.

That began to change in 2023, Palmer's third year. The club started to take off.

Whether a player had years of experience or had never picked up a stick, the team became a haven—a way to escape academic stress and find a supportive community. A large freshman class joined in the fall of 2023, enabling full practices and regional tournament play for the first time in years.

On October 28, 2023, Charlotte hosted its first-ever club game against the University of South Carolina. Despite the 3-2 overtime loss, the game marked a new chapter—and proved the team was ready to compete.

After graduating in spring 2024, Trumbauer

stayed on board as head coach for the 2024-2025 season. She led Charlotte into five fall and three spring tournaments, guiding the team to a top national ranking and a spot in the 2025 National Tournament.

They opened their fall 2024 season in Knoxville, Tenn., at the University of Tennessee. Facing fierce competition, they built confidence along the way—something Trumbauer emphasizes in her coaching.

"I try to remind my players why we signed up for this in the first place," said Trumbauer. "Even though we may not all have the exact verbatim reason why we all chose to be a part of the team, we all have the same desire to have a sense of community and have people you can lean on and have an outlet outside of your stressful daily life."

In spring 2025, club treasurer and second-year student Eve Goldman added to that mission, establishing a Charlotte chapter of Morgan's Message, an organization that promotes mental health awareness and support for student-athletes.

The 49ers closed out their home season with a 3-1 win over Appalachian State University before heading to the main event: the National Field Hockey Spring Tournament.

On April 11, the 49ers dropped their first game 2-1 to Virginia Tech but bounced back with a 2-0 shutout over Richmond later in the day.

Day two brought their toughest challenge. The University of Vermont, who had not allowed a single goal all tournament, nearly shut out Charlotte 4-0—until the 49ers scored in the final seconds to make it 4-1, a testament to the team's resilience and fight.

In their final match, Charlotte took down UConn 2-1, finishing 2-2 in pool play, ce-

menting their status and capping a memorable tournament with pride and momentum for the future.

As Palmer prepares to graduate with Nationals behind her, she leaves a legacy that speaks for itself.

"Nationals is probably one of my favorite memories, going 2-1 against Virginia Tech, who was No. 7 in the country," said Palmer. "I was happy about that. Then, I think we were the only team to score on Vermont in our pool of teams, [and] they were the No. 9 team in the country. So, [I'm] just so proud of everyone's individual accolades and how they played as a team."

With growing interest and national buzz, whispers of Charlotte launching a Division I program have begun to circulate.

"At Nationals, we overheard some refs talking about our team, and they were like, 'UNC Charlotte looks good. They might have a Division-I program in the next couple years,'" said Trumbauer. "I've had so many people coming up to me, whether it's players from USA Field Hockey or just other coaches that I coach with, asking, 'When is [Charlotte] gonna get a Division-I program?' and I really do think that we are on a track to get there."

What started with just two determined players has now become a nationally recognized club program—built on passion, persistence and purpose. Whether players dream of going Division I or simply seek a place to belong, Charlotte club field hockey opens the door to opportunity every academic year.

All it takes is grit and growth: These are the two strong pillars of 49ers club field hockey.



Photo courtesy of UNC Charlotte Club Field Hockey

49er football begins to take shape at Spring Showcase as Loftis leads QB room

Shree Bhagalia | Staff Contributor

Jerry Richardson Stadium welcomed new players and old fans on April 19 for their Spring Showcase to preview an all-new, all-different era of Charlotte football.

Overseeing it all was new Head Coach Tim Albin, who wrapped up the team's spring practice period with the showcase before offseason training resumes with summer workouts in late June.

The Spring Showcase is a traditional spring game open to all 49er families and fans, giving Charlotte a glimpse of what the upcoming season might look like.

With Bill Belichick bringing the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) to the Queen City and the 2024 Southeastern Conference champions, the University of Georgia, set to host the 49ers this season, Charlotte football will need to bring their A-game early.

Yet, with just months until their August kickoff against Appalachian State University in the Duke's Mayo Kickoff Classic, Charlotte football is still looking to improve.

"[This is] our most difficult day. We're not in game shape right now, but no team is," said Albin. "As a staff, we're gonna have to make some tough decisions (cuts) in the next 36 hours, and I'm dreading it. We're looking for versatility, particularly on the offensive and defensive positions. When you have a team that doesn't return a lot of experience, in terms of playing time, we thought this was important."

Charlotte's football roster currently sits at 120 players, and with the spring period wrapping up, that roster has to be refined to 105 players.

Loftis takes first snaps as QB room takes shape

Three players likely to remain on the roster is Charlotte's trio of transfer quarterbacks, who all are competing for a starting spot.

Still, Duke University transfer and redshirt sophomore quarterback Grayson Loftis may be a player Charlotte fans want to keep their eyes on.

Loftis was behind center through the opening snaps of the team period, completing seven of 11 passes. Through the live periods of 11-on-11, he looked strong as a passer and attacking from the pocket.

At Duke, Loftis saw limited action in 2024 but started for the Blue Devils in five games as a true freshman in the year prior. In those games, Loftis flashed talent, throwing for 1,006 yards and eight touchdowns.

While he seems to be a top contender for Charlotte's starting quarterback job, the 49ers will need more of those freshman season sparks to have offensive success in 2025.

Working behind Loftis was redshirt junior Conner Harrell, who hails from UNC with three seasons under his belt. Coming in for Loftis, Harrell completed six of his 10 attempts, mainly on screens and check-downs.

Against Charlotte last season on Sept. 7, 2024, Harrell went 16-for-25 passing for 219 yards, three touchdowns and an interception. The quarterback's second career start proved he could step up and shine in given moments.

Third to see snaps was redshirt junior quarterback Zach Wilcke from Northwest Mississippi Community College.

Wilcke took second-team reps for the majority of the day, completing five of 10 attempts. Prior to the showcase, Wilcke missed multiple practices due to a high-ankle sprain but performed during the showcase with no signs of struggle.

Brown a question mark within promising WR group

Among all the transfer portal moves and changes stands wide receiver Sean Brown, who is potentially entering his sixth year in college football. Brown, who was a notable participant at Charlotte's Pro Day, is still pending eligibility from the NCAA, meaning his return to Charlotte and the extra year of eligibility is still in limbo.

However, if he can return, he will be a threat downfield and a huge help for whoever starts under center.

In the 2024 season, Brown had 35 receptions for 470 yards and was No. 2 on the team in receiving yards.

Outside of Brown, senior wide receiver Jayden McGowan could play a prominent role in the offense. A transfer from Boston College, he had an explosive two years in years prior with Vanderbilt University, recording 80 receptions for 836 yards and two touchdowns.

Receivers sophomore Miles Burris and graduate E.

Jai Mason may vie for prominent roles in the offense. The duo each saw four targets and wowed attendees with slippery play after the catch.

"We got the ball out on a quick game, slipped a couple tackles and were able to get some yards after contact," said Albin. "It's exciting, everyone loves playmakers."

Long way to game day

With Albin's hiring coming just months ago, on Dec. 8, 2024, Charlotte's offense has yet to congeal, but so does the team's identity.

"We want to continue to develop leadership, and to-day was the first step of that," said

Albin. "I'm big on culture. [The] portal builds a team, but I know culture develops the program. We have an elite coaching staff and supporting staff; we're all in alignment. It's an exciting time for Charlotte football. It really is."

As time winds down between practice and play, Charlotte football will have to work hard in the coming months to turn potential into proof.





Column: Rinse, repeat, rebuild: Stingless Hornets face familiar finish

Ian Shure | Staff Writer

With the 2024-2025 NBA season coming to a close, Hornets fans' perspectives regarding their season are varied. Whether fans are happy it is over or looking forward to the next season, one thing is sure: This season was more like what the Hornets have seen in the last two.

In the 2023-2024 season, Charlotte finished an injury-ridden season with a 21-61 record and the No. 6 overall pick. Despite noticeable development from some of the Hornets' young players and a new head coach, the Hornets only got worse.

Injury luck again did not fall in their favor; Grant Williams, Tre Mann and Brandon Miller all sustained season-ending injuries before the all-star break, and the team finished 19-63 overall, securing a tie for the best odds for the No. 1 pick.

The good

Forward Miles Bridges went into the season, coming off a career year in the season prior. After a concerningly slow start, Bridges was forced to step up and take a leadership role after his teammates fell to injury.

While fan opinion on Bridges is split after his prior controversy, Bridges remains a bright spot for the Hornets squad, averaging 20.3 points per game this season.

In his first year as head coach, Charles Lee had a solid year despite what the record may show, as he set a foundation for the future. He re-established the defensive capabilities former Coach Steve Clifford brought to the team his first go-around while also bringing a new style of offense to Charlotte.

General Manager Jeff Peterson had another solid year, not only hiring Lee, but also in the trade market, finding ways to improve the Hornets' roster.

Peterson added guard Vasilije Micić and center Jusuf Nurkić, who both were key contributors down the line while selling other players for valuable picks.

At the start of the year, 23-year-old forward Moussa Diabaté was signed to a two-way contract. Due to injuries, he was forced to play the maximum number of games for a two-way play-

er, forcing the Hornets to either sign him to a full contract or let him go.

Charlotte eventually signed Diabaté to a three-year, \$5.7 million contract, and he ended up making NBA history, becoming the first player to start a season as a two-way player and play the most games for a team.

Diabaté was just what this team needed, giving them a real interior force for the future, avoiding overreliance on Bridges or Williams.

The ugly

It is the same story year after year. Whenever it seems the team will get into a groove and has figured it out, another key player goes down with an injury that sidelines them for a significant amount of time.

The Hornets had 45 different starting lineups this season. Managing all these lineups is beyond arduous, especially with a new coaching staff and an existing lack of talent and continuity.

The question becomes, is this a training staff issue? A player issue? Or something outside of the public eye? Charlotte employed 33 different starting lineups in the previous season, so this is, unfortunately, no new challenge. With another offseason on the horizon, fans can only pray this will not repeat.

When you have had a lottery pick in the last two seasons, you would like to see the team's record improve each year, slowly but surely.

That has not been far from the case with the Hornets, with the team tallying 67 combined wins in three seasons, worse than the number of wins the Oklahoma City Thunder obtained this season alone.

Despite adding talent in the draft, the team has gotten fewer wins each season, going from 27 in 2022-23 to 21 last year and ending up with 19 this year, the No. 3-worst record in franchise history.

Somewhere in between

Two weeks before the season concluded, it was announced that star guard LaMelo Ball would undergo minor surgery on his wrist and ankles. However, the team's decision to shut him down

and save his health, rather than risking it and forcing him to play, will provide him with the necessary time to heal.

Ball had a fantastic year for the Hornets, leading the team in scoring on less-than-desirable efficiency but driving the offense almost entirely. The Hornets have struggled to succeed without Ball, so ensuring his health is key.

On the day of the trade deadline, Charlotte traded Williams to the Los Angeles Lakers for Dalton Knecht, Cam Reddish, a 2031 first-round pick and a 2030 pick swap.

Considering the injury history for Williams, it was an excellent trade for the Hornets. However, the Lakers rescinded the trade a week later, claiming Williams failed his physical.

This left Williams to return to Charlotte, where he plainly balled out, averaging 14.9 points, 10.8 rebounds and 2.5 assists per game since the botched trade.

The future

Not everything is gloomy for the future. Charlotte is tied for the best odds in the 2025 NBA draft lottery and the best odds to get a generational talent in 18-year-old Duke University forward Cooper Flagg. Even if the lottery does not go in their favor and the Hornets land a pick between 2-7, this is a draft class loaded with talent. No matter whose name is called by the Hornets in June, they are sure to be a key contributor.

So, here we are again. Another season, another injury list longer than a CVS receipt and another shot at a top draft pick. The Hornets did not run it back but limped through and came up short. Again. But there is hope on the horizon. The draft odds are in their favor, Ball is getting healthy and Lee has a real foundation to build on.

Whether the team finally turns the corner or keeps circling the same block is still up in the air. But for now, all eyes are on June 25, and just maybe this is the year Charlotte hears its name called first.

