

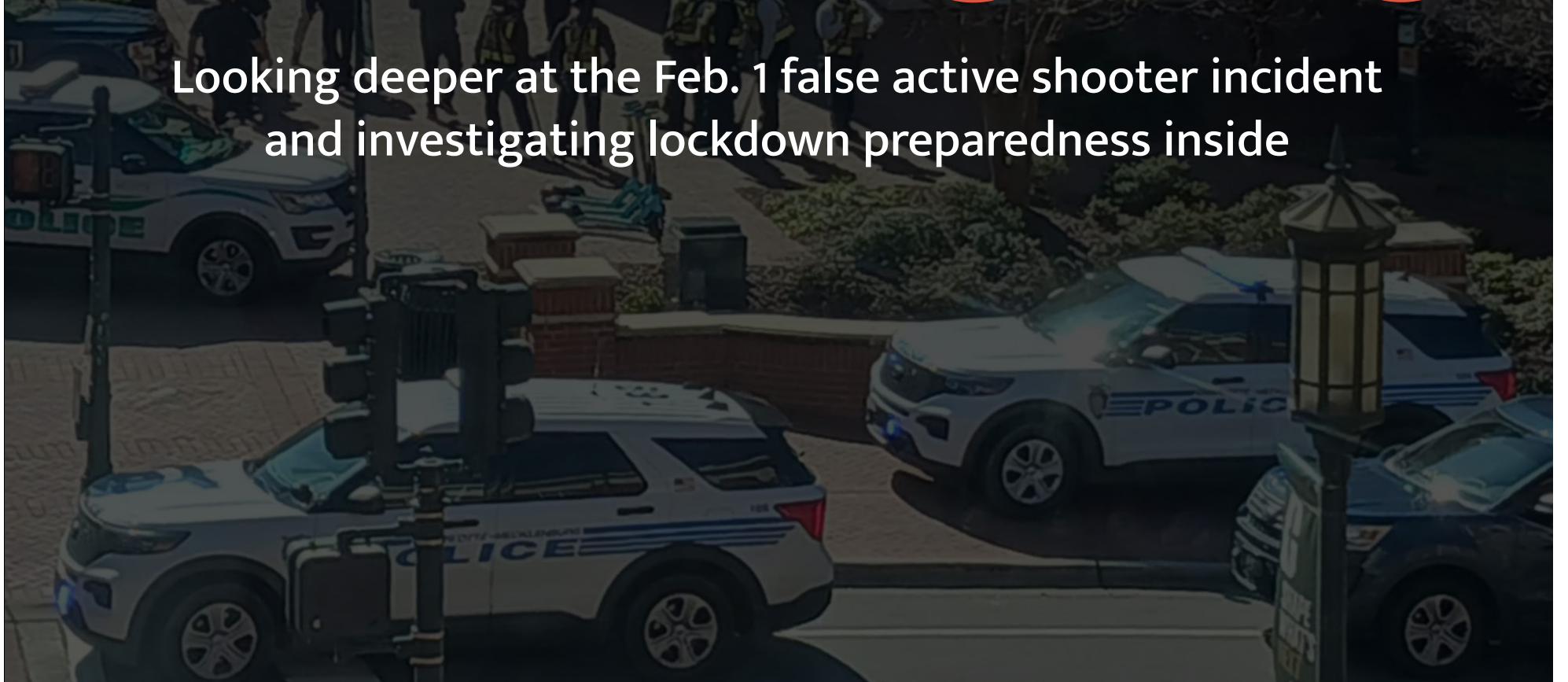
# NINERTIMES

*Student-driven news since 1947*

Feb. 6, 2024

## IT SHOULD NOT TAKE **21 MINUTES**

Looking deeper at the Feb. 1 false active shooter incident  
and investigating lockdown preparedness inside



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## **Student-driven news since 1947**

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

The Niner Times aims to provide accurate and fair news to the UNC Charlotte community. We cover campus happenings, news and events in the city of Charlotte and North Carolina and topics that are important to students. We publish written, photo and video content online (ninertimes.com), on social media and through our weekly email newsletter (sent every Tuesday at 9:30 am). We also produce a supplemental bi-weekly (every other week) in-print newspaper that hits stands on Tuesdays.

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CONTENT WARNING: THIS ISSUE DISCUSSES A POTENTIAL SHOOTER, GUN VIOLENCE AND A PAST SHOOTINGS ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

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# Looking deeper at the Feb. 1 falsely reported active shooter incident at UNC Charlotte: Events, timeline and details from campus police

AJ Siegel & Bryson Foster | Copy Editor & Outreach Coordinator

## What happened

CMPD received calls about the potential threat at 11:51 a.m. and dispatched to campus.

According to a student who asked to remain anonymous, the rumors about a shooting threat

texting their partner, who was in Mebane 010 and said that they thought they heard shots being fired. The person who was not on campus called 911 to dispatch the University Division of CMPD.

us, as we could have responded directly, but our response was still real quick," said Baker. "But nevertheless, there was a delay because it went through different channels. CMPD had to actually call our dispatcher, and our dispatcher gave the call. Even with that delay, we still were in the room and in the building before CMPD could get here."

Once they arrived on the scene, police investigated inside and outside of CHHS and Mebane and talked with students on the scene.

"We went right into the room and met with the students who were present. Officers determined that there was no shooting in the room," said Baker. "So we immediately did a cursory search outside. While we were doing so, we noticed that lots of students were sitting, and it became abundantly clear to us that there was not a shooting."

After speaking with people on the scene and reviewing outdoor security footage, police determined that there was a loud noise near the time CMPD received the call. The loud noise was caused by a large cabinet that fell over, according to Baker.

The first NinerAlert was sent to campus at 12:12 p.m., saying that there was an active police presence on campus.

People were told to stay away from CHHS/COED Plaza. Those outside were directed into

the Popp Martin Student Union or Halton Arena, the University Recreation Center and other nearby buildings.

People in CHHS, Mebane and Woodward sheltered in place until police told them to evacuate.

The only University alert that specifically mentioned the potential shooting threat was the Niner Notice sent at 1 p.m. The other alerts only discussed the police presence.

## Campus police report

According to the Feb. 2 campus police report, shots fired were reported to campus police at 11:52 a.m. The incident description is as follows:

"Dispatch received a call from a CMPD dispatcher regarding reports of shots fired in the College of Education building. Officers responded and immediately determined the incident did not occur and the sound heard was not shots. Officers conducted a sweep of the building and determined it was safe for students and staff to re-enter. A 9910-information report will be completed to document the incident."

The Niner Times has requested public records and logs from CMPD and the University. The Niner Times will continue to provide updates as they become available.

“There was a delay because it went through different channels. CMPD had to actually call our dispatcher, and our dispatcher gave the call. Even with that delay, we still were in the room and in the building before CMPD could get here.”

Jeffery Baker  
UNC Charlotte Chief of Police

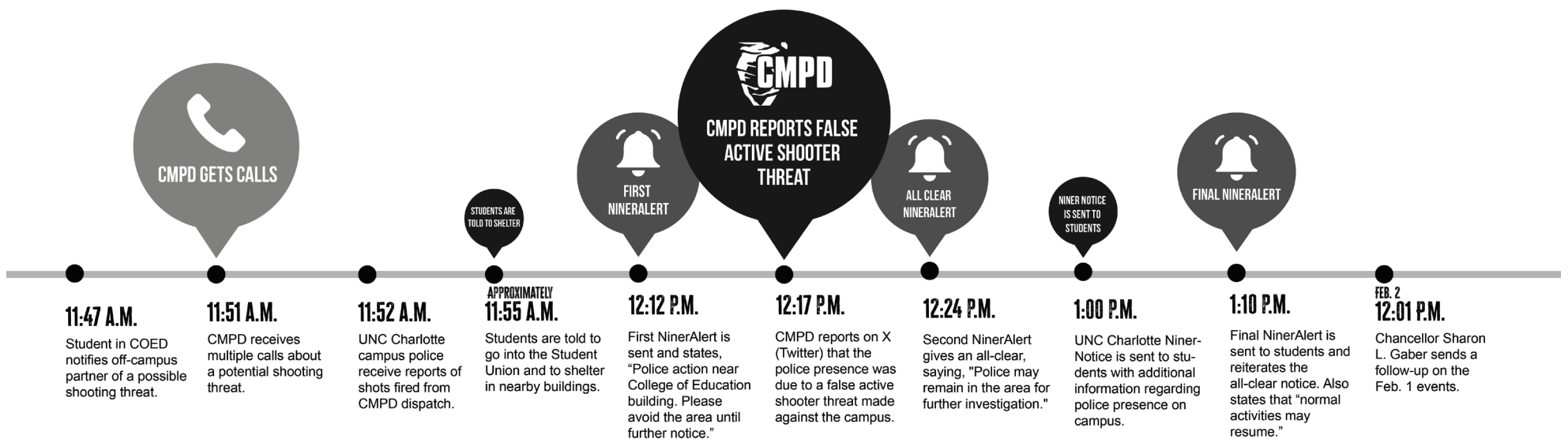
began in Mebane 010 because students in the room heard banging noises. One of the student's Birdie alarms then went off, which led the people in the room to believe that there was a shooting taking place.

According to UNC Charlotte Police Department's Chief of Police Jeffery Baker, CMPD received a call from someone 40 to 50 miles away from campus. The caller had been

CMPD received multiple other calls about the potential threat, according to the CMPD University Division Dispatch transcript and the anonymous student.

Since the call about the shooting threat went to 911, CMPD was dispatched and then had to alert campus police of the call.

"It would have been better if he had called



Ashley Legassie/Niner Times

# Investigating lockdown preparedness and materials following the Feb. 1 false active shooter threat

AJ Siegel & Clare Grealey | Copy & Asst. Copy Editors

The Niner Times received several reports of missing and incomplete lockdown kits in Mebane Hall, CHHS and Woodward Hall. The lockdown kits are meant to keep room doors that cannot be locked from the inside shut in the event of a lockdown.

Following the Feb. 1 incident, the Niner Times examined 55 unlocked rooms across Mebane, CHHS and the first floor of Woodward to determine the state and presence of lockdown kits and other preparedness materials in the three buildings locked down during the incident.

## Key takeaways from the NT investigation

- CHHS had the most violations of the University's standards for room lockdown preparedness, with three problematic rooms that cannot be locked.
- The kits' door wedges are effective on carpet but are very ineffective on tile flooring.
- The kits' fire hoses are effective for both outward and inward-opening doors, but they work better on outward-opening doors.
- Seven lockdown kits were missing the instruction sheet.

## Investigating lockdown preparedness and materials

On Feb. 2 and Feb. 3, the Niner Times examined 55 rooms across Mebane, CHHS and the first floor of Woodward, as these three buildings were locked down during the Feb. 1 incident. The 55 rooms were all of the unlocked rooms that the Niner Times was able to access while conducting a walk-through of the three buildings. There is room for error, as all data was tracked manually by the Niner Times editorial staff.

During the investigation, The Niner Times noted the following:

- Whether the door locks and, if so, what type of lock (electronic, manual or with a key)
- Number of doors and the direction in which they open
- Presence of a lockdown kit
- Items in lockdown kit (instructions, door wedge, fire hose and facemasks)
- Presence of an emergency manual

Most of the investigation focused on classrooms, but other rooms, such as study rooms or student lounges, were also included if they had at least one door and contained seating areas.

The University considers a room to be effectively prepared for a lockdown if the room's doors are lockable from the inside and, if not, the room has a lockdown kit with the proper door-blocking tools. The specific needs of each room, such as whether it needs a door wedge or a fire hose, vary. The Niner Times classified a room as properly equipped if it met these for being prepared for a lockdown.

## Lockdown kits

Following the shooting that occurred on April 30, 2019, UNC Charlotte identified approximately 700 doors that could not be locked from the inside, or that did not lock at all. As a result, lockdown kits were installed in rooms and teaching laboratories that did not have interior locks on their doors.

These kits are canvas bags meant to be hung on the side of a podium or on the wall near a door. They should contain instructions for use, medical masks, a door wedge for inward-opening doors and a cut fire hose for outward-opening doors. There should be enough door wedges or fire hoses for each door in a room.

## Emergency manuals

The emergency manuals are documents hung near doors that detail preparation and procedures for various emergency situations, including severe weather, fire, bomb threats, campus evacuations and active assailants.

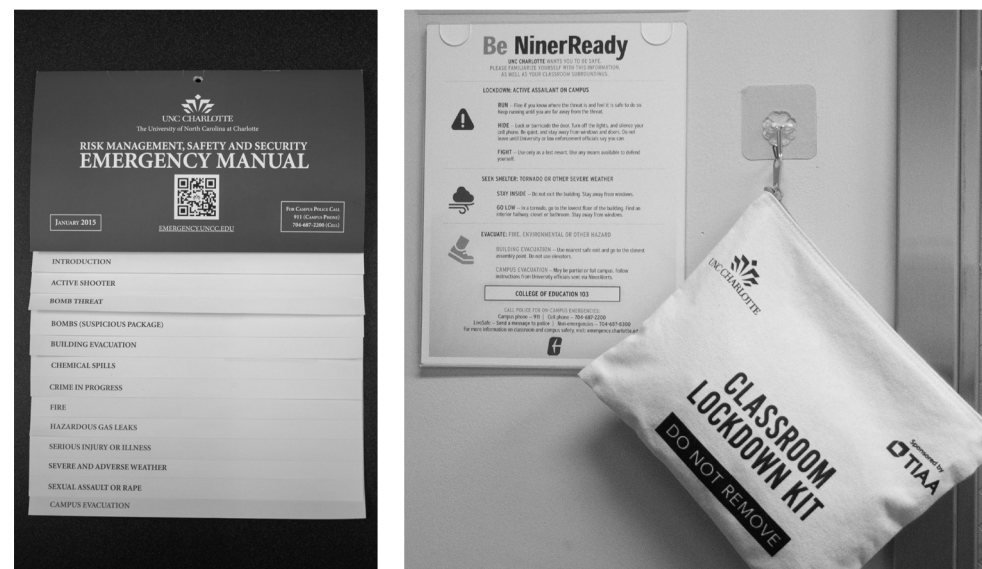
The physical copies have not been updated since 2015.

## Door locks

The lockable doors examined had three types of locks. An electronic lock opens a door with keycard access and cannot be locked from the inside by people in the room. They can only be locked by the University in the event of a full lockdown.

There were two types of manual locks: those that can be locked by physically turning the door's lock and those that can be locked with a key. It is unclear whether professors receive keys to these doors or if these rooms would only be lockable by building staff.

Doors with no electronic or manual lock would only be able to be kept locked with the proper lockdown kit materials.



(Left) Emergency manual from January 2015 (top left), Preparedness Poster and lockdown kit (top right) and the contents of lockdown kits (bottom) | Sunnya Hadavi/Niner Times

## Investigation's findings

Nine of the 55 unlocked rooms examined are not equipped for a lockdown based on the University's standards. Additionally, some lockdown kit materials are ineffective for particular spaces.

### Door wedge effectiveness

The door wedges are meant to be used for inward opening doors. Twenty-four rooms had door wedges in their lockdown kits.

The Niner Times tested the door wedges in rooms with carpet and tile flooring and found that the doorstops are virtually ineffective on tile flooring.

With a door wedge on carpet, the door could not be opened. However, with a door wedge on tile, the door could be easily opened with minimal physical effort.

### Fire hose effectiveness

The fire hoses are meant to be used with outward-opening doors. Thirteen rooms had fire hoses in their lockdown kits.

The Niner Times tested the fire hoses on inward and outward opening doors. The fire hoses were more effective on outward opening doors, though they did help stop inward opening doors from being completely opened.

When used on outward opening doors, the door could not be opened. When used on inward opening doors, the door could be opened a few inches, enough for someone to fit a hand or arm through the opening.

## Statistics breakdown

### Mebane Hall

The Niner Times examined 20 unlocked rooms on the first three floors of Mebane, two of which had no lockdown kit.

Fifteen of these rooms were lockable, with nine having an electronic lock and six having a manual lock that did not require a key. All 15 lockable rooms had a lockdown kit.

The Niner Times found 19 total lockdown kits in Mebane, four of which were incomplete. Room 169 and 065 were missing instructions. Room 168 was missing a door wedge or fire hose, though the door has a manual lock. Room 037 was missing a door wedge or fire hose, though the door has an electronic lock.

Nine rooms in Mebane did not have an emergency manual.

Based on the University's standards, two rooms are not properly equipped for a lockdown.

Mebane 103 has a barricade box in addition to a lockdown kit. A barricade box is a small box next to the door handle that contains a rope that should be wrapped around the barricade box and the door handle to make the door harder to open. When testing the barricade box, the Niner Times found that the door was still able to be opened but only a few inches.

Mebane 062 had an additional "active shooter/active threat response kit." This kit contained a seatbelt cutter and window hammer, rope, a rubber door stopper, EMS shears, hemostatic granules, gauze pads, entry/exit wound chest seals, a tourniquet and a wound wrap.

### CHHS

The Niner Times examined 29 unlocked rooms on the first three floors of CHHS.

Twenty-four rooms had doors that were lockable from the inside. Two had electronic locks. Nine were lockable using a manual lock. Thirteen were lockable using a key.

Of the 24 lockable rooms, 13 still had lockdown kits.

Five rooms did not have lockable doors. Of these, three had lockdown kits, but only one was complete. Room 155 was missing a fire hose, and room 281 was missing instructions.

Seventeen rooms in CHHS did not have an emergency manual.

Based on University standards, two CHHS rooms are not properly equipped for a lockdown.

### Woodward Hall

The Niner Times examined six rooms on the first floor of Woodward.

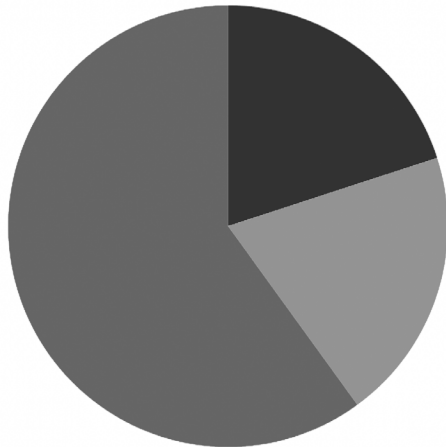
Five of the rooms were only lockable with a key. The other room cannot be locked. Only one of the five lockable rooms had a lockdown kit.

Only two of the six rooms examined had lockdown kits. One kit was complete, and the other was missing instructions.

Five rooms missed an emergency manual.

Based on the University's standards, four rooms on the first floor of Woodward are not properly equipped for a lockdown.

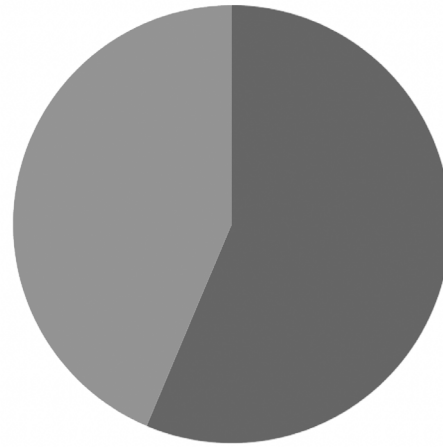
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### Distribution of lock types

The number of investigated rooms with mechanical locks (60%), electronic locks (20%) and no locking mechanism (20%).

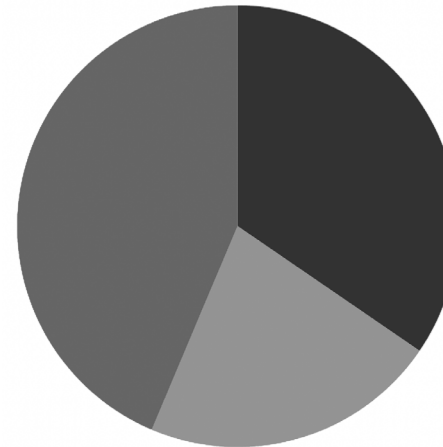
- No lock
- Mechanical lock
- Electric lock



### Distribution of emergency manuals

The number of investigated rooms containing emergency manuals (56.3%) and missing emergency manuals (43.7%).

- With an emergency manual
- Without an emergency manual



### Distribution of lockdown kits

The number of investigated rooms with complete (43.6%), incomplete (21.8%) and missing (34.6%) lockdown kits based on University standards.

- No kit
- Complete lock
- Incomplete lock

# Potential lockdown and preparedness improvements from the Niner Times

## Niner Times' lockdown kit standards

Though 46 rooms met University standards for lockdown preparation, after examining the effectiveness of lockdown kits in different types of rooms, there is room for improvement.

The Niner Times believes the lockdown kits should be held to the following standards:

- Every kit should have at one door wedge or fire hose per door depending on the opening direction of the door. Door wedges must also work on all types of flooring, including tile.
- Every kit should provide general lockdown instructions, along with instructions for preparing that specific room for a lockdown.
- Every room should have a complete kit meeting the above standards, even if the door is lockable.

## Niner Times' Preparedness Poster standards

While rooms already have custom printed Preparedness Posters displaying incase of emergencies which were added following the shooting on April 30, 2019, the Niner Times believes a second or modified poster should be added to include the following:

- How to use the items in the lockdown kits
- Where lockdown kits are located in the room
- What that specific room will have in their kits

The Niner Times believes that either or both the Office of Emergency Management and the Department of Police and Public Safety should check each room and lockdown kit after every semester, to ensure they are easily accessible and stocked according to what each room needs.

Data visualizations by Sunnya Hadavi & Matthew De La Rosa/Niner Times

# Breaking down UNC Charlotte's security and warning policies as of Feb. 4

Sunnaya Hadavi | Editor-in-Chief

Following the incident on Feb. 1 involving a false shooter threat, the Niner Times reviewed the existing online resources and policies for campus safety and security.

## Who is responsible for campus safety and security?

Matters relating to public safety and security in instances of an active shooter on campus are the responsibility of the Department of Safety and Security, a division of Business Affairs. Safety & Security is the overarching organization tasked with providing general, administrative and fiscal oversight to its three departments: Police and Public Safety, Emergency Management, and Environmental Health and Safety.

### Police & Public Safety

Police & Public Safety is UNC Charlotte's fully authorized state police agency. The UNC Charlotte Police Department operates separately from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Force (CMPD) and other regional law enforcement agencies.

Chief of Police Jeffery Baker is the acting director of Police & Public Safety and has been in this role since 2009.

### Emergency Management

Emergency Management "help[s] the campus community prepare for, respond to, and recover from any emergency that threatens the University." This includes the issuing of either a NinerNotice or NinerAlert.

"The office is responsible for coordinating efforts related to the four phases of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery," says the homepage of the OEM website.

## Who leads the Department of Safety and Security?

Retired U.S. Army colonel John Bogdan has been the associate vice chancellor for safety and security at UNC Charlotte since Jan. 2, 2019.

"Bogdan will be responsible for the coordination and oversight of the plans and programs that protect lives and property, prevent accidents and incidents, and preserve the learning environment and business operations of the University," said the University in an announcement about Bogdan's position on campus.

Bogdan has received criticism from students and faculty at the University since starting in this role due to his prior position as the brigade commander at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay.

## University's lockdown procedures and emergency manual

In instances of a lockdown emergency, the University directs the campus community to the Emergency Management website ([www.emergency.charlotte.edu](http://www.emergency.charlotte.edu)).

The Emergency Management website homepage features information for emergency preparedness, including details and an FAQ on

NinerAlerts, NinerNotice and the NinerReady program. The homepage also mentions and directs individuals to separate pages with their three action directives for seeking shelter in weather emergencies, evacuations and lockdowns.

UNC Charlotte also has a customizable and printable emergency manual online at [www.coop.charlotte.edu](http://www.coop.charlotte.edu). This manual has 18 sections, including Active Assailants, Bomb Threat, Hazardous Gas Leaks and Building and Campus Evacuation. Some classrooms also have a physical version of the emergency manual from 2015.

The manual can only be accessed online once signing into a NinerNet account, which can include completion of the Duo Mobile multi-factor authentication.

A direct link to Charlotte's emergency manual can also be found on the University's emergency manual website. However, this section is only viewable when going to the overarching Preparedness webpage.

The availability of manuals, guides and details for different types of emergencies are inconsistent between the institutions in the University of North Carolina System. UNC-Chapel Hill, North Carolina State University and Appalachian State University, at a minimum, have public guides and information for preparedness and response on their Emergency Management webpages.

## NinerAlert and Timely Warning Notice policies

The University utilizes NinerAlerts to notify members of the campus community of an impending or imminent threat. NinerAlerts are sent through University email, text message, digital screen take-over, the LiveSafe App, social media and alert sirens.

Students, faculty and staff who have provided a phone number to the University are automatically enrolled in NinerAlerts text messaging.

Campus partners, families and visitors of the University may also opt in to NinerAlerts text messaging. Individuals can text "unccharlottealerts" to 67283 to opt in. Enrollment for these individuals expires after one year, meaning they must re-enroll.

The University is also required by the Clery Act (passed by Congress in 1990) to provide timely warnings of crimes in hopes of providing students, families and other consumers with accurate and timely information about campus safety.

UNC Charlotte's most recent Annual Security

and Fire Safety Report from Oct. 1, 2023, includes the policies for campus safety.

As listed in the annual report, Timely Warnings are considered for the following crimes: criminal homicide, sex offenses, robbery, aggravated assault, hate crimes, burglary, motor vehicle theft and arson. In addition to listed crimes, Timely Warnings are to be sent when there is any crime that "poses a serious or continual threat to the campus community and/or the surrounding area."

Timely Warnings are issued on a case-by-case basis using all of the facts surrounding a crime and must be done in a reasonable possible timeframe.

"Every attempt must be made to issue a Timely Warning as soon as is reasonably possible after the facts of the incidents have been established," says the annual report. "For threats that are considered particularly exigent, a Timely Warning may be issued immediately with any known facts and then continually updated until the threat is contained or neutralized."

The full directive for Emergency Notifications and Timely Warnings can be found in the annual report. This policy was effective beginning Aug. 24, 2011, and was most recently updated on July 15, 2022. This guide was approved and signed by Baker.

## Safety and Security Enhancements following April 30, 2019 shooting

On April 30, 2019, UNC Charlotte had an active shooter on campus. Since the events of April 30th, the University said that they completed additional safety and security enhancements.

The security enhancements vary from the purchase and implementation of situational awareness software to the installation of lockdown kits. Many of the enhancements were short-term, such as extra police presence and training sessions for the start of the new semester.

The Emergency Management website contains a page dedicated to each of the additional safety and security enhancements following April 30. The page is said to be continuously updated and currently only has updates from May to December 2019.



Campus police during the fourth Day of Remembrance on April 28, 2023. | Jade Suszek/Niner Times File Photo

Read more at  
[ninertimes.com](http://ninertimes.com)



# Police Chief Jeffery Baker speaks at the SGA General Assembly about the Feb. 1 false active shooter threat and campus police's response

AJ Siegel & Sunnya Hadavi | Copy Editor & Editor-in-Chief

UNC Charlotte Police Department's Chief of Police Jeffery Baker provided details about the campus false shooter threat at the Student Government Association (SGA) Student Senate general assembly meeting on Feb. 1.

In this meeting, Baker provided an overview of the events, the police response to the false shooter threat and answered questions from SGA Senators and the Niner Times.

**Sen. Joe Wholey:** What determines the point at which a NinerAlert is sent? Why is that not something that is immediately sent even when we [do not] have a threat so that we can protect and notify people as soon as possible, as opposed to making them wait 20 minutes?

**Chief Jeffery Baker:** That's something that we always strive to do is make sure that, obviously, that information gets out as quickly as possible. I can say that back in 2019, when it was verified that we did have such an incident occur, we got the messaging out immediately. There are some time barriers and... I have not received the exact timeline yet. So, I don't want to misspeak for UComm (University Communications). I do want to look at that and see where we were. But I can tell you that within five minutes of my arrival, it was clear to me we didn't have anything. I mean, it was just that there was no doubt in my mind. I was busy trying to communicate that to as many people as I could.

**Sen. Justice Mascorro:** Are there any plans in the future [to] ensure that there will not be any delay or anything that could potentially endanger a student in an unreasonable fashion?

**Baker:** We do everything we can to make certain that no one is injured and that no one is ever hurt. And our response, I think, speaks for itself. From my end, on the ground, it was clear to me [that] we did not have an active shooter on campus. And getting that information out as quickly as we could, that's just something [where] I'm going to look at the actual timelines, what I look at, these are CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch) numbers... So we knew there was no act of shooting, and much of the information we had been told from [CMPD] was not correct. There is a timeframe where [we want to] make sure that if we're going to do something like we did when we did have an active shoot-

er, and we're going to lock the campus down... And this one [was] much different... Our dispatch didn't receive one call. When we had the shooting in 2019, our dispatch had so many calls that it locked one of the phones up. That's how feverishly the calls were coming into our dispatch. Everybody wants to know something instantly, but there's going to always be some delay for police to get there and figure out exactly what they have and get that out. But as I said... we were confident there was not an incident... and there's been some real bad outcomes where there's an over-response by law enforcement, and that's something obviously I do not condone. I never want our officers to over-respond either because that can be really bad as well. But these calls are really tricky. You can imagine. You really have to discern the response, what you're doing about it and how we're continuing through it.

**Chief of Staff Sasha Sembur:** Once the police knew that there was no threat, would it have been possible to send out an alert saying that there was no threat just so that people would not be confused in the future? Or is that not possible?

**Baker:** It's really important that when we make decisions, we review every angle of this, and certainly if there's an improvement that can be made, we want to do that... As I mentioned, the one thing about this is there wasn't a shooter, and there was no evidence of a shooter. Within about a total of 30 minutes, the faculty were back in the building and resuming classes because there was not a serious incident. Sending out something a little quicker that would say, "The incidents under investigation. We're looking into it at this time. It doesn't appear as what's being said," I don't have a problem doing that at all. And certainly, we can do it, but I can tell you that these types of situations are controlled chaos.

**Sen. Alvin Cui:** A lot of people who saw the [NinerAlerts] might have found it to be vaguely worded... People have concerns over whether NinerAlerts are well prepared to deal with emergencies because they were unaware, but these ones are delayed because there was almost certainly no active threat on campus.

**Baker:** It sounded vague because we were still in the process of confirming with everyone. We

had to find the people who actually said that this had happened. When we found them, we wanted to make certain. We also wanted to do a cursory search to make sure that there wasn't something we missed. We were running; we were trying to do that as fast as we could.

Read more at  
ninertimes.com



UNC Charlotte Chief of Police Jeffery Baker | Courtesy of UNC Charlotte

# Students share experiences a falsely reported active shoo

Niner Times Editorial Board

On Feb. 1, UNC Charlotte experienced a false active shooter threat on campus. To many students and faculty, the response was sub-par for a University that has experienced an active shooter once before. Here, students share their experiences, anxiety and frustrations from the event with the Niner Times. The full statements can be found online at [ninertimes.com](http://ninertimes.com).

I saw my classmates **crying, panicking, calling their loved ones** to tell them they loved them, hugging each other, etc. What was perhaps the scariest thing was seeing our professors just as frightened as we were. To an outsider, it may have seemed we were being dramatic for assuming the worst with no evidence, but at the end of the day, when you know nothing and a police officer holding a huge gun is telling you to get to safety, you're going to think you're in danger.

**Kenna Haynes, fourth-year student, Mebane Hall**

I experienced the mass shooting that took place in April 2019. I currently have a younger sister, Vanessa, who attends UNC Charlotte. She told me if it had not been for another student coming into the Friday building and telling everyone there was a possible shooter, she would not have known until the campus notified her 20 minutes later. This is **concerning** to me because of what **I experienced on campus back in 2019 and know how important minutes — seconds — are.**

**Camila Flores, graduated from UNC Charlotte in December 2019**

We remained in the classroom and eventually left after the class time ended, at 12:45. Only then did we notice that the COED building appeared to have been evacuated. It, therefore, follows that **Charlotte's police response incompetently failed to check all rooms** in the building for students or suspects. If there really had been a mass shooter in the building, we would have been in serious danger.

**Josephine Leugers, master's student, Mebane Hall**

I was on the first floor of COED. We only found out because a classmate stepped out, and a cop told her to evacuate. That is the only way we found out. **NinerAlerts should not take more than 15-20 minutes to send out an alert and just say "police activity."** A shooting happened here in 2019; you would think they would be more on top of this.

**Hailey Lambert, third-year student, Mebane Hall**

I am **scared to go back to class** for fear of knowing that if someone really wanted to do something, they would probably feel confident in getting away with it after seeing Feb. 1's events. We want to see change, and we're not going to be quiet about it.

**Kylie Elixson, Mebane Hall**

I [am a teaching assistant] for a class in Woodward, and one of the other TAs received a Discord notification from a server she is in with some classmates saying there was an active shooter at around 12:05. **We didn't know if it was real or not**, but then we got text messages from friends saying something was happening on campus a couple of minutes later. The fact that **we found out about a potential shooter through social media is appalling.**

**Josh Magnotta, second-year student, Woodward Hall**



# and feelings during the Feb. 1 shooter threat at UNC Charlotte

Around noon, I left to use the restroom and saw two cops in riot gear, which struck me as really weird, but they were strolling so casually, and one even had his shield slung over his shoulder, so I assumed they must have been there for a demonstration for a class or something. When I came out of the restroom, there was a class evacuating, and one person was crying and panicking, saying, **“We need to get out of here.”**

**Haley Fichter, third-year student, CHHS**

We all rushed into a room at the back of the classroom and shut the lights off. We were **huddled for what felt like hours** before the door creaked open, and we heard footsteps right outside where we were hiding. Luckily, it was a police officer, but he didn't announce himself and wasn't in uniform, so it was **terrifying**.

**Charlie Pearsall, first-year student and Niner Times illustrator, Mebane Hall**

How many more students' lives need to be taken in order for the campus to understand that this event, fake or not, is **extremely traumatic**? The amount of worry parents had in their voices when they were being told there was an active shooter on their child's campus. Spouses who received those phone calls that there was a possible active shooter near them. What about the students who are parents and have children? It's **devastating and disturbing** how UNC Charlotte handled this.

**Alyssa Thao, third-year student, CHHS**

The school's response was **shamefully inadequate**. During weather events, we receive more NinerAlerts than necessary, and it is surprising this event did not follow the same pattern. As classes resumed after the belated 'all-clear' was issued by the school, the return to business as usual was disturbing. Saying “false alarm, all-clear” is different than feeling that it is so.

**Nikki Ferguson, third-year student, CHHS**

My professor didn't see them, so he kept teaching, but a couple of minutes later, he said, “There are police outside with shields. **I think we need to leave; everyone pack your bags and go.**” All of us packed our stuff with no hesitation and left the room.

**Hadley Duquette, third-year student, CHHS**

While some students fled for safety, others walked to class. UNC Charlotte's social media has become overtaken by an image of a student riding an electric scooter while a plainclothes police officer in a bulletproof vest and carrying an assault rifle sprints by. **This cannot be considered acceptable**. It just can't. If Feb. 1 was real, it wouldn't have been Charlotte's first shooting.

**Devdan Ferguson, early college student**

The male staff and other male students started **barricading the door with tables**. We were instructed to sit and put our bookbags in front of our chests to protect us. They also said if we have pepper spray to have it ready. They then turned off the lights and told us to stay quiet.

**Dazel Cularte, second-year student, Woodward Hall**

My professor shut the door and turned off the lights, then asked someone for a belt to help her tie something to make the door hard to open. Then the cops banged on our door, and my professor opened it. The belts looked so loose and useless; they just dangled there. I think that's what will stay with me. **That feeling of powerlessness**.

**Anonymous, third-year student, Mebane Hall**

# UNC Charlotte professors and teaching assistants speak about the events of Feb. 1

Niner Times Editorial Board

On Thursday, Feb. 1, there were reports of a potential active shooter threat in Mebane Hall (College of Education; COED). About fifty police cars from the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) surrounded the area at 11:55 a.m., causing classrooms to go into lockdown.

The following statements are from professors and teaching assistants (TAs) who were in Mebane Hall and Woodward Hall on Feb. 1.

## **Ryan Augsutyniak, assistant professor of teaching, Mebane Hall**

In 2014, I was studying at Florida State University during an on-campus shooting, and this campus community is less than five years removed from one in which two students were murdered. [Feb. 1] was a terrifying and frustrating experience. I felt both responsible and powerless. My students and I were in the safest place we could have been, but I was unable to communicate with them with any clarity about what was going on. It's a terrible feeling to know that the spaces we try to make safe for students can so easily become sites of extreme distress. Students should never have to see armed cops in their classroom. I was encouraged, though, by the thoughtfulness and care students showed one another. I hope that student perspectives and

concerns will be taken seriously as the University assesses the situation.

## **Simon Gibson, professor of practice in history and archaeology, Mebane Hall**

We are extremely lucky that this was only a false alarm. We do, however, need to be constantly on alert. My students were wonderful in the circumstances, and none of them panicked. The police were very efficient and told us to lock ourselves in the classroom and to barricade the doors.

## **Sai Harsha Paladugu, teaching assistant for computing and informatics, Woodward Hall**

I was informed about the event by a student before the NinerAlert. He mentioned an active shooter near the COED building. Students began to panic about the situation. My immediate reaction was not to panic. And suggested that they not leave the classroom. I assured the students that if evacuation was necessary, an announcement would be made. About five minutes later, we received an alert confirming police action near the COED building. I was genuinely concerned about what might happen but felt a sense of relief when I learned it was a false alarm.

## **Yonghong Yan, associate professor for computing and informatics, Woodward Hall**

When one of the students interrupted the class and told us about the possibility of an active shooter, I was shocked the first moment, and before I realized what we should do, the students said that we needed to lock the door and block the door window. I told students three things to do in case: run, fight back and hide. But be careful of hiding, and it is often that fighting back might be a better option than hiding if it is too close to the shooter. We might need to break the window to run. I also reminded myself that I need to protect them as I am their instructor. We stayed alert but calm until it was clear. It was frightening for a moment, but I/we quickly calmed down and did what we were trained and told.

## **Anish Kurani, third-year and teaching assistant for computing and informatics, Woodward Hall**

As this is not exactly a situation we are trained for, I attempted to do my best to help everyone maintain their composure. As the rumors of the situation started to spread around, I told my students that they did not have to complete their quiz if they did not want to. I think mentally, I

overcame my worry, especially since I still had classes and work to think about. Perhaps it is because we have unfortunately gotten used to hearing false alarms or non-false alarms. I don't think I speak for all TAs, but for myself, at least, I have thought about the possibility of a situation like this occurring and how I would respond. I think my colleagues did well to quell tension in that high-stress environment.

## **Ilana Rivkovich, assistant director of College of Computing and Informatics advising and Learning Communities coordinator, Woodward Hall**

We all tried to remain as calm as possible, telling the students that if they could, they should grab chairs in case they needed to throw them at the potential assailant or anything else they had. We also told them to put their laptops in their backpacks and wear them in front to protect their chest. This was scary, as we didn't know what was actually happening, but we did not take any chances. Even though there wasn't an actual active shooter situation on campus, the emotional reactions to these perceived events still feel very real. Having active shooter training for all University members might be beneficial moving forward.



Jade Suszek/Niner Times File Photo

# Editorial: It should not take 21 minutes to alert the campus community

Niner Times Editorial Board

On Feb. 1, around 11:51 a.m., the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department lined Craver Road after receiving calls about a potential threat in Mebane Hall, formerly the College of Education (COED) building.

Twenty-one minutes passed.

At 12:12 p.m., the first NinerAlert was sent out stating, "Police action near College of Education building. Please avoid the area until further notice."

At 12:24 p.m., the second NinerAlert gave an all-clear.

## Delayed NinerAlerts

Confusion circling Feb. 1's event stems from the lack of notice from the University.

Campus police arrived at the scene, followed by the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD). Officers entered Mebane armed with riot shields and firearms. Students fled into classrooms, buildings, closed areas or away from the area before any alert from the University was received.

We began to receive a flood of messages from the Niner Times staff members at 11:56 a.m. while working in the newsroom. We had no idea of what was happening, and it all felt fake until the advisor of Student Niner Media urged us to get into an office without any windows. The rumor was that a gun or shooter was reportedly on campus.

In the midst of this, we kept patiently waiting for a NinerAlert to clarify the situation. Many students were doing the same, getting their primary information through Snapchat, Discord, Reddit and worried texts, not a NinerAlert.

It took 21 minutes for the first NinerAlert, a system that is supposed to notify students of

any threat to safety, to be sent out. At this point, students were emotionally jerked into a state of panic.

There were 21 minutes of rumors, hypotheticals and panic flooding our phones.

Ultimately, we are frustrated with the need for more urgency and care that the alerts neglected to present. In those 21 minutes, students were left in a frenzied state of false information, having to fend for themselves.

Professors, students and the rest of the Charlotte community could not keep themselves safe because of these 21 minutes of silence from the University.

## Inconsistent procedures

Students' reactions to this event have left us shocked. But Charlotte's response has left us angry.

The University knows better.

Charlotte is our home. The newsroom is our sanctuary. After watching the scene unfold across the street from our newsroom, we are hurt and uncomfortable with the University's reaction and response.

Thankfully, there was no shooting. However, the lack of communication created a dangerous space and mindset for students. Even if CMPD knew ahead of time that it was a falsely reported shooting, the rest of the community deserved to know, and alerts of police presence should have been sent out sooner to prevent panic.

Especially after the tragedy of April 30, 2019, Charlotte must have faculty trained consistently in protocols to follow, considering emergencies.

The delayed NinerAlerts have had detrimental effects on everyone. Not knowing what was happening, staff ushered students in and out of

buildings with inconsistent protocols. Some were told to evacuate immediately, and others were in lockdown, hiding in classrooms.

Professors should also be notified promptly so that they can fulfill the accurate response procedures.

Charlotte must do better in prioritizing the safety of its community. Waiting to know if there is an active shooter while half of the University is hiding and the other half is unaware is unacceptable. CMPD and campus police knew there was no shooter, but that message was not relayed back to students and staff. Imagine the fear and emotional detriment that could have been prevented if we knew.

If this event was a dress rehearsal for a real emergency, the University has displayed a poor job in emergency response and management.

## Call to action

We need quicker responses. It should not take 21 minutes to send out a vague message stating the obvious presence of police. We need clear preventative alerts within a minute or two of the situation.

While we understand that some things may be out of the University's control, 21 minutes of silence cannot be repeated. Even if it was a false alarm, the University must use every second of every minute to inform and protect students.

Functional lockdown kits must be accessible for students and faculty in every classroom. For lockdown kits to be effective, they must be in every classroom with clear instructions. Each kit must have all the items, and the University must ensure that each item works.

The door wedges that are a part of these kits do not work on tile flooring, and many of the

classrooms have tile floors. The kits must be fixed with proper tools and door wedges that work for both tile and carpet floors. Both students and staff must be educated consistently on how to use these kits properly.

Currently, printed and laminated emergency manuals from 2015 are hanging in classrooms. The only way for students to access current emergency manuals is through their NinerNet account. Getting through NinerNet login alone takes up too much time and creates more anxiety. All classrooms should have visible and updated emergency manuals, and digital versions should be easy to access.

The University staff should not doubt their ability to perform emergency management.

We as students should not witness unpredictable and inconsistent courses of action from the University and educators whom we trust.

Feb. 1 was unacceptable. As a community that has dealt with gun violence on our campus before, we cannot just second-guess the proper ways to tackle emergencies, and should not be taken for granted.

This instance was a false alarm, but we cannot make light of it. Let us not experience the real thing unprepared.

We encourage students to discuss their experiences — don't stray away from them. It is vital to create an open dialogue between students, authorities and the University. Looking forward, this is not a moment to forget. This is a moment to learn from everything that happened and work to avoid these mistakes in the future.



Police gathered outside Mebane Hall on Feb. 1 | Jesse Morris/Niner Times



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False Active Shooter Threat Made Against UNC Charlotte Campus



Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department



Minor alert

8800 Block of Craver Road, Charlotte

False Active Shooter Threat Made Against UNC Charlotte Campus



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From atlasone.app

# PHOTOS: POLICE RESPOND TO A FALSE ACTIVE SHOOTER THREAT AT MEBANE HALL ON FEB. 1

Photos by Sunnya Hadavi & Jesse Morris/Niner Times

Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) and campus police responded to a potential shooting threat on UNC Charlotte's campus on Feb. 1 after receiving calls about the possible threat. An "all-clear" was sent out to students at 12:25 p.m. Police determined that there was no shooting threat and no shots fired.

The alleged gunfire was heard near or in Mebane Hall, formerly the College of Education (COED) Building.

CMPD arrived on campus at approximately 11:55 a.m. There were approximately 50 police officers from CMPD and UNC Charlotte campus police on campus, who were on the

scene for roughly an hour.

The call to CMPD came from someone off campus who had been in contact with someone on campus. The person on campus had heard discussions of shots fired after a cabinet fell outside of Mebane, according to Jeffery Baker, UNC Charlotte campus police chief, during the Feb. 1 Student Government Association's student senate general assembly meeting.

The Niner Times photographed and gathered images from that day and incident. Gathered images came from a multitude of online platforms, such as Snapchat, X (Twitter) and YikYak.



NinerAlert: Police action near College of Education building. Please avoid the area until further notice.



# Letter to the Editor: We will not wait for the next school shooting

Signed by 144 student leaders representing over 90 groups across the nation

**Content Warning: This letter mentions shootings at schools in America.**

**Editor's Note: The following is a student-written letter, signed by 144 student leaders and meant to be published simultaneously across over 90 student newspapers. The breadth of this letter is national and includes public and private universities. It hopes to create attention around gun violence and act as a demonstration of the shared concern about gun violence that exists across all college campuses.**

Students are taught to love a country that values guns over our lives.

Some of us hear the sound of gunfire when we watch fireworks on the Fourth of July, or when we watch a drumline performance at halftime. But all of us have heard the siren of an active shooter drill and fear that one day our campus will be next.

By painful necessity, we have grown to become much more than students learning in a classroom — we have shed every last remnant of our childhood innocence. The steady silence of Congress is as deafening as gunfire.

We will not wait for individual trauma to affect

us all before we respond together — our empathy is not that brittle. Our generation responds to shootings by bearing witness and sharing solidarity like none other. We text each other our last thoughts and we cry on each others' shoulders and we mourn with each other at vigils. We convene in classrooms and we congregate in churches and we deliberate in dining halls. We're staunch and we're stubborn and we're steadfast.

Our hearts bled from this uniquely American brand of gun violence. Yet, we still summon the courage to witness firework shows and remind ourselves that we love our country so much that we expect better from it.

We believe that our country has the capacity to love us back. There are bullet shaped holes in our hearts, but our spirits are unbreakable.

History has taught us that when injustice calls students to act, we shape the moral arc of this country.

Students in the Civil Rights Movement shared their stories through protest, creating the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) that organized Freedom Rides, sit-ins and marches. In demanding freedom from racial violence, this group's activism became woven into American history.

Students across America organized teach-ins during the Vietnam War to expose its calculated cruelties — in doing so, rediscovering this country's empathy. Their work, in demanding

freedom from conscription and taxpayer-funded violence, is intertwined with the American story.

This fall, UNC Chapel Hill students' text exchanges during the Aug. 28 shooting reached the hands of the president. The nation read the desperate words of our wounded community, as we organized support, rallied and got thrown out of the North Carolina General Assembly. We demanded freedom from gun violence, just as we have in Parkland and Sandy Hook and MSU and UNLV.

For 360,000 of us since Columbine, the toll of bearing witness, of losing our classmates and friends, of succumbing to the cursed emotional vocabulary of survivorship, has become our American story.

Yes, it is not fair that we must rise up against problems that we did not create, but the organizers of past student movements know from lived experience that we decide the future of the country.

The country watched student sit-ins at Greensboro, and Congress subsequently passed civil rights legislation. The country witnessed as students exposed its lies on Vietnam, and Congress subsequently withdrew from the war.

In recent years, the country watched student survivors march against gun violence, and the White House subsequently created the National Office of Gun Violence Prevention on Sept. 22, 2023.

So as students and young people alike, we should know our words don't end on this page — we will channel them into change.

We invite you to join this generation's community of organizers, all of us united in demanding a future free of gun violence. We understand the gravity of this commitment, because it's not simply our lives we protect with prose and protest. It is our way of life itself.

We will not allow America to be painted in a new layer of blood. We will not allow politicians to gamble our lives for NRA money.

And most of all, politicians will not have the shallow privilege of reading another front-cover op-ed by students on their knees, begging them to do their jobs — we do not need a permission slip to defend our freedoms. They will instead contend with the reality that by uniting with each other and among parents, educators and communities, our demands become undeniable.

We feel intense anger and frustration and sadness, and in its wake we search for reaffirmations of our empathy — the remarkable human capacity to take on a tiny part of someone else's suffering. We rediscover this fulfillment in our organizing, in our community, in not just moving away from the unbearable pain of our yesterday but in moving toward an unrelenting hope for our tomorrow.

Our generation dares politicians to look us in the eye and tell us they're too afraid to try.



Chris Crews/Niner Times File Photo

# Charlotte men's basketball sinks ECU 67-52 in front of sold out crowd in Halton Arena

Sam Perry | Staff Writer

On Saturday, Feb. 3, the Charlotte men's basketball team defeated the East Carolina University (ECU) Pirates 67-52 at home in Halton. This all-around physical performance brought a program record of eight straight conference game wins.

"I've been a part of a lot of big games in the past, but that was fun," said Head Coach Aaron Fearne. "If you can't get excited about being at a sporting event like this game, then you don't have a pulse. That was magic, and that was a fun game."

Charlotte was victorious in front of a sold-out crowd of 8,201 people, staying No. 1 in the American Athletic Conference (AAC) with an 8-1 record AAC record and a 14-7 record overall. ECU fell to 11-12 overall and 4-6 in the AAC.

## Setting the stage

This game stage was set in motion long before the ESPN truck arrived to set up for the first nationally televised game this season.

Coming into the matchup, Charlotte sat atop the conference standings after being voted to finish second to last under their interim coach. Since then, the team has far exceeded expectations. Fearne has won over the hearts and minds of the entire fanbase, which led to the creation of #Fearneville.

Friday night before the game, students camped out to get the best seats in the arena in a tradition back when Head Coach Bobby Lutz led the program and won big games left and right. The tradition, then known as Lutzville, was discarded when the program went into disarray without him.

The newfound life from the success this season led to the creation of #Fearneville, and the energy bled from the campers outside into the heart of the arena come Saturday afternoon.

## Early game jitters

The big stage of the game had both teams running a little high to start, especially Charlotte. The 49ers did not score their first points until nearly two minutes into the game when redshirt sophomore center Dishon Jackson converted a second-chance layup, catching the ball with one second on the clock.

The teams were trading points, with nobody claiming a big lead. A four-point-scoring run saw ECU take a narrow 10-9 lead, which they relented a minute later on a layup with 12:11 left in the first half as Charlotte led 11-10.

## Narrowing the gap

The 49ers seemed to have found their rhythm, scoring the game's last five points with 4:37 left in its first frame, leading 24-18. The Pirates remained undaunted in the opening half, scoring six of the final eight points to cut the Charlotte lead to 26-24 heading into halftime.

## Physicality coming out to play out of the break

Junior guard Jaden Walker hit the first shot out of the break to give ECU a 27-26 lead, showing they were ready to play out of the break.

Seven of the following nine points of the game came from the charity stripe as the team decided they would see who could win the physicality game; both teams found themselves with 31 points apiece with 18 minutes to play.

With 17 minutes on the clock, junior forward Igor Miličić Jr. hit a dagger three on a second-chance bucket and gave the 49ers a 34-31 lead that never wavered.

## Late game closeout

ECU tried to bounce back but went through a cold spell from the 8:34 mark, where they were down 49-44. Charlotte had added nine points to lead 58-46 in the game's final minutes.

The 49ers defended Fearneville and Halton Arena to stay No. 1, winning the game 67-52.

## Takeaways

The home crowd played a significant factor in the game, getting in the heads of the Pirates as they missed all of their free throw attempts in the first half. Then, the crowd gave Charlotte the spark to close out the game.

Team basketball prevailed with the 49ers as they had three players with double-digit points and three more players sitting within one or two points from double digits. This goes back to Fearne's favorite saying this season, "It is incredible what you can do when nobody takes the credit."

Paint dominance was the shining light in the victory as Charlotte outscored ECU 34-22 in the paint, which was a difference maker when both teams only made four threes each all game.

## Stars of the game

Miličić was a standout on the afternoon with his seventh double-double of the season, totaling 12 points, 10 rebounds, one assist, one steal and five blocks.

Redshirt junior Lu'Cye Patterson led the 49ers in scoring with 16 points while adding four rebounds, two assists and one steal to his name on 7-13 shooting.

In the losing effort, junior guard RJ Felton led the Pirates with 20 points, five rebounds, one assist and two steals.



Junior guard Isiah Folkes (5) catches a lob from sophomore guard Nik Graves (10) | Chris Crews/Niner Times

# The Gold Mine camps outside Halton Arena ahead of Charlotte men's basketball matchup against ECU

Itza Ochoa & Davis Cuffe | Sports & Asst. Sports Editors

UNC Charlotte's Gold Mine, the official student section of the 49ers, camped outside of Halton Arena the night of Feb. 2, ahead of the Charlotte men's basketball game against the East Carolina University Pirates on Feb. 3.

"I'm just excited that the student body is having an unbelievable experience," said Head Coach Aaron Fearne. "These students that are going to [camp out], that's what they're going to talk about down the track and reflect back on that experience and how much pride and joy

senior guard Jackson Threadgill, redshirt junior guard Lu'Cye Patterson and junior forward Igor Miličić Jr. to help hand out Domino's pizza.

"It feels like we are a community right now. We're all one group; we're all together," said first-year student Vidhur Jagadeesh. "Everyone here feels like they're family."

Jagadeesh said he hopes to see more student involvement.

"We need more things like this to make us feel like an actual school. We get the commuter school rep. Things like this are what breaks that stereotype."

Fourth-year Nathan McPherson said the Charlotte community is what inspired him to join the event.

"This team has won seven straight [games], and this is historically a basketball-rich university. Why not come out here, do this and party all night?"

McPherson, a student section leader of the Gold Mine, was surprised at the turnout.

"We expected 25 people here, and there are over 125," said McPherson. "It's been electric; it's an amazing atmosphere."

you have representing your program and your university."

As students began to line up with their tents at 6 p.m., Fearne made an appearance alongside

**"I'm just excited that the student body is having an unbelievable experience. These students that are going to [camp out], that's what they're going to talk about down the track and reflect back on that experience."**

**Aaron Fearne**  
Men's basketball Head Coach

Students camping for this event, dubbed #Fearneville, anticipated being the first in line as Halton Arena saw its first sellout crowd since Feb. 2, 2013.

## NINERTIMES Super Bowl Picks

Logos courtesy of the NFL | Ashley Legassie & Denise Soriano/Niner Times



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Editor-in-Chief  
49ers 27-24

**Bryson Foster**  
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**Kelli Blackburn**  
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**Jared Feinburg**  
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CHIEFS 31-28

**Emily Brown**  
Sports Staff Writer  
CHIEFS 24-14

## CLT CHARLOTTE 49ERS SCOREBOARD

### RECENT GAMES JAN. 21- FEB. 4

#### MEN'S BASKETBALL

Jan. 23: Charlotte 76, UAB 70  
Jan. 27: Charlotte 75, UTSA 71  
Feb. 3: Charlotte 67, East Carolina 52

#### WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Jan. 21: Temple 73, Charlotte 68  
Jan. 27: Tulsa 65, Charlotte 55  
Jan. 31: Tulane 70, Charlotte 68  
Feb. 4: Charlotte 88, Temple 81

#### MEN'S TENNIS

Jan. 28: Virginia Tech 5, Charlotte 2  
Jan. 28: Charlotte 4, Bellarmine 3  
Feb. 2: South Florida 6, Charlotte 1  
Feb. 3: Charlotte 5, Florida Atlantic 2

#### WOMEN'S TENNIS

Jan. 26: Kentucky 4, Charlotte 3  
Jan. 27: Charlotte 4, Oregon 2  
Feb. 3: Clemson 4, Charlotte 2

### OVERALL STANDINGS

Men's basketball: 11-7, 5-1

Women's basketball: 12-7, 5-2

### UPCOMING GAMES

Men's basketball  
@ South Florida on Tuesday, Feb. 6 at 9 p.m.

Women's basketball  
@ East Carolina on Saturday,  
Feb. 10 at 2 p.m.

Men's tennis  
@ Georgia State on Friday, Feb. 9 at 2 p.m.

Women's tennis  
Vs. James Madison on Friday, Feb. 9 at 11 a.m.

# Nik Graves and Charlotte men's basketball breakout in 2023-2024 season

Davis Cuffe | Asst. Sports Editor

The energy has shifted for Charlotte men's basketball, and with it, so has the play of sophomore guard Nik Graves. Charlotte has won their last seven games, and in that stretch, Graves has averaged 12 points, 2.9 rebounds, and 2.6 assists, a massive step up from his first season as a 49er.

## Charlotte's hot streak

After going 1-4 in the five games before Charlotte's winning streak, the 49ers flipped the script with a win against a ranked conference opponent, No. 17 Florida Atlantic University. While fans of Charlotte basketball see the on-court results, off-court work has helped Charlotte basketball be successful.

"There's a comradery on the court, but off the court, we always hang out," said Graves. "I think, honestly, just that bond we have off the court and the hard work we put in each and every day has made us successful."

Despite standing near the top of the American Athletic Conference (AAC), Charlotte was 6-7 before their win streak. The 49ers started their conference play on a 12-point loss to Southern Methodist University that benefitted the squad in the long run.

"I hate to say that losing is good for us, but just having that feeling and not wanting to feel that again really helped. The SMU game -they were a lot tougher than us," said Graves. "After the game, we were saying that we don't want to ever feel like a team was being more tough than us."

## Graves' improvement

In his freshman season as a 49er, Graves averaged 8.4 minutes and a little over one point per game. In Charlotte's first game of Grave's sophomore season, he was announced as a starter and seized the opportunity, scoring 15 points while not turning over the ball or missing a shot once. Following the hot start, Graves hasn't slowed down. He currently averages 10.1 points, 3.4 rebounds and 2.8 assists per game, a massive leap from his first year.

While opportunity has helped Graves reach his level of play, working on trust and his own game helped propel him to success.

"Falling back in love with the game, falling back in love with the hard work," said Graves. "Just having a trust that my teammates trust

me and my coaches have confidence in me, along with knowing that if I take a shot, it's not a shot that I don't work on."

With Graves' performance taking a jump, so have expectations. As Charlotte's new starting point guard, he has been put in situations that would cause panic for other young guards, but Graves has been unphased by the brighter lights.

"Yeah, I mean honestly, it's been fun," said Graves. "I don't think it's anything I wasn't capable of. Bright lights, big games, stuff like that, it's never really a factor for me. Just going out and playing the sport and game that I love, it's always been something I do."

Graves' confidence and trust are best showcased by his ball security. Despite facing top AAC defenses nightly, Graves has a 2.7 assist/turnover ratio, which ties for No. 3 in the AAC.

## Big changes in year two

Along with Graves' role changing in his sophomore season, Charlotte men's basketball underwent a coaching and conference change in the offseason.

Aaron Fearne was named the head coach of Charlotte men's basketball on June 15, 2023, after five years under previous Head Coach Ron Sanchez. Fearne has taken the Charlotte fanbase by storm and earned a fanbase, the "Fearneville Fanatics," a name for the students camped outside Halton Arena for Charlotte's Feb. 3 game against East Carolina University.

Fearne's success has gained the support of both fans and players.

"Coach Fearne has been great," Graves said. "He's hard on us; he expects the most from us each and every day. His coaching and coaching style has been a big change. Whether it be in the game or in practice, we go at each other and compete every day."

An on-the-court change Graves and the 49ers faced was an adjustment to different competition. After 10 years in Conference USA, Charlotte switched to the AAC, which meant new competition and unfamiliar opponents.

Despite the two significant changes, the team's biggest challenge has been staying grounded amidst a quickly rising level of support.

"Honestly, I think the biggest challenge has been staying focused and not getting too into the hype we have right now," said Graves.

## Family ties

Nik is not the first Graves family member to star for Charlotte basketball. His mother, Nikki Graves, scored 1,000 points for the 49ers in her time with the women's basketball team from 1996-99.

"It's definitely special being able to continue a legacy that my mom started," said Graves. "I say all the time that I never saw footage of her, so I don't know how good she really was, but 1,000 points isn't an easy thing to do. My dad's also an alumni, so having that connection and support is just special."

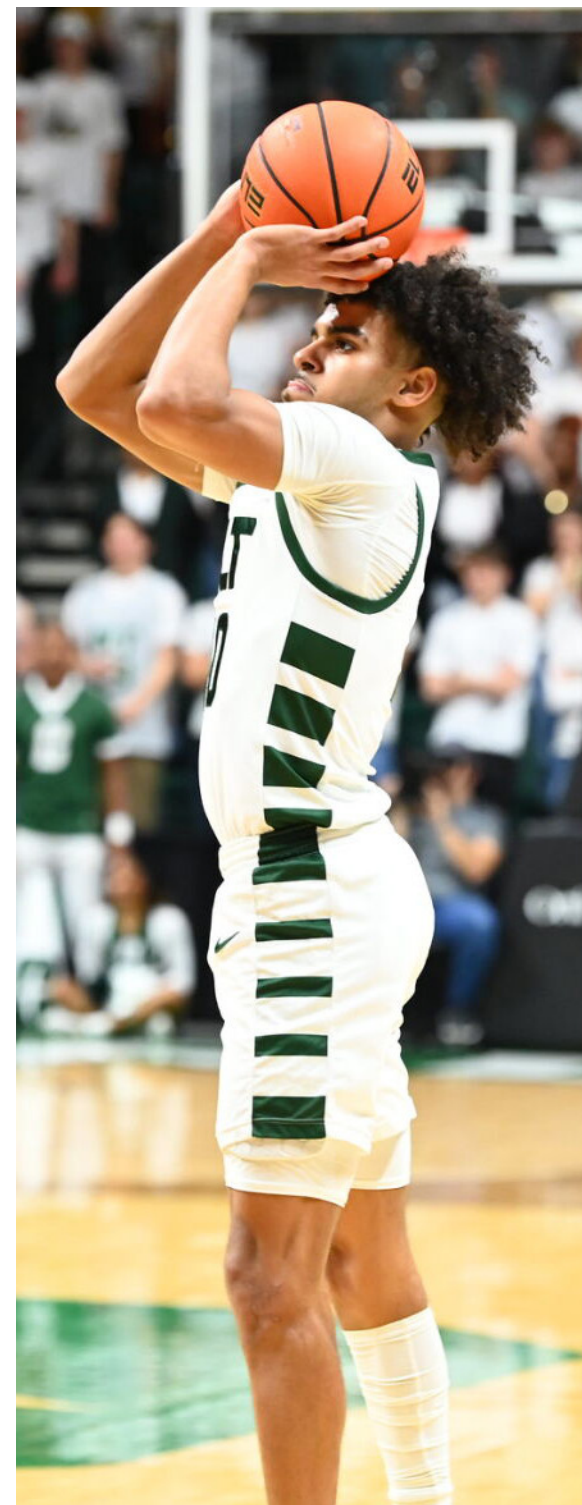
Not alone in his basketball journey as a Graves child, Nik's sister is a 1,000-point scorer for her high school and grew up playing basketball alongside Nik. With two 1,000-point scorers in the family, friendly competition is present in Graves's household.

"Growing up, I always had to hear about my mom being a 1,000-point scorer and being better than me growing up," said Graves. "I never scored 1,000 points in high school, so now I gotta hear from my little sister apparently, she's better than me, so it's just a competitive household. But we all push each other to be better, there's things that my mom and dad told me that I still use to this day and things that I can carry on and give to my little sister."

## Looking forward

With the 49ers emerging as genuine contenders in the AAC, expectations for Graves and other star players are higher than ever. As the season winds down, the fate of the 49ers rests on their shoulders.

"I think we can go as far as we want to go, as far as our work takes us, as long as we don't get complacent and keep being the hard-nosed gritty team that we know we are," said Graves. "I think we could go into the post-season and shock some people. We have an opportunity to do something that hasn't been done in a long time."



Sophomore guard Nik Graves (10) rises up to hit a shot against East Carolina University | Chris Crews/ Niner Times