NINER TIMES

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March 27, 2024



Let's talk Divine Nine fashion

MORE ON PAGE 9

INSIDE: SPRING FEVER 2024

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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 Wednesday at 9:30 am). We also produce a supplemental bi-weekly (every other week) in-print newspaper that hits stands on Wednesdays.

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NEWS

SJSWANA HOLDS ANOTHER DIE-IN TO RAISE AWARENESS OF GENOCIDE OF PALESTINIANS 3

HELLO ASIA MARKET FOSTERS ASIAN COMMUNITY 4

ISAIAH GRAYSON AND JAMES CITRIN NAMED 2024-2025 STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT 5

FROM THE UNC CHARLOTTE POLICE LOGS (MARCH 17 - 22, 2024) 6

GAMES, P. 7

PHOTOS

SOUTH ASIAN STUDENT ASSOCIATION HOSTS HOLI 8

ARTS & CULTURE

LET'S TALK GREEK FASHION 9

SHODO CALLIGRAPHY CLUB'S RETURN TO CAMPUS 10

'HOW TO DANCE IN OHIO' DESERVED ITS PLACE ON BROADWAY 11

OPINION

UNCERTAINTY SURROUNDING TIKTOK BAN FURTHER PROVES AMERICANS' DISTRUST TOWARD GOVERNMENT 12

SPORTS

CHARLOTTE DISC GOLF ASKS, 'WHY NOT CHARLOTTE?' 13

ARIANNA RODI LEADS NATIONALLY-RANKED CHARLOTTE SOFTBALL IN 2024 14

NCAA TOURNAMENT BRINGS EXCITEMENT TO THE SPECTRUM CENTER 15

SJSWANA holds another die-in to raise awareness of genocide of Palestinians

Davis Cuffe & Sofia DiStefano | Asst. Sports Editor & Asst. News Editor

Outside of the Popp Martin Student Union and in the CHHS/COED Plaza on March 22, a group of protesters engaged in a die-in to promote awareness of the ongoing genocide of Palestinians. This is the second major die-in, following one held on Feb. 21.

The protest occurred from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Protestors were encouraged to demonstrate "anywhere on your campus," according to an Instagram post on the SJPCarolinas, SJSWANA, UNCSJP, UNCGSJP and MerecoSJP accounts.

As part of the die-in, demonstrators acted dead and laid in battered clothing painted red to mirror blood from injuries. Some faces were covered in cloth, while others waved the Palestinian flag.

The students involved are from Social Justice for South West Asia and North Africa (SJSWANA), a women-led Charlotte-based social justice organization dedicated to advocating for issues in the SWANA region. It was created in October 2023 and is not affiliated with UNC Charlotte or a registered student organization.

Many of the students involved in SJSWANA feel strongly about the topic at hand and have stated that they are actively involved.

"We're helping this cause because some of us are directly affected by the cause [as] we have family members in Palestine. And even if we didn't, you don't have to be Palestinian to stand for the cause of Palestine. These people are dying; children are dying daily," said a protester.

Members of SJSWANA encourage other UNC Charlotte students to educate themselves on the matter.

This demonstration was part of a larger student-led movement in the Carolinas aiming to put pressure on university officials.

"A lot of campuses throughout the Carolinas decided to come together to create a more organized unified front here. With campuses like Davidson taking active and successful steps towards divestment from Israeli apartheid, we felt that we should put more pressure on our respective universities here in the South, and coming together, we feel, is the effective pressure we need to be presenting our campuses with," said a statement from SJSWANA.

With the continued attention the group has received regarding their protests, they plan to keep holding demonstrations to promote awareness.

"This week is Israeli apartheid week, which helped jumpstart our SJPCarolinas coalition. Given the success of our last die-in, we felt that holding a demonstration like that again would be successful once more. This time around, we are opening it up to everyone rather than doing things behind closed doors as we would love to see our community support," said SJSWANA.

As the death toll continues to grow in Palestine, protesters wanted to make their frustrations clear and call attention to the recent massacres.

"We're also very frustrated seeing the death grow every day now, with the horrific flour massacre committed by Israeli forces just a few weeks ago against starving civilians, the continued bloodshed against Gazans, and the essentially state-sanctioned famine within Gaza," said SJSWANA. "We hope that through this die-in, our frustrations with the international community and with the persisting silence on our campus can be made clear."

With this die-in, SJSWANA aimed to highlight the importance of advocating for Palestinians, especially during Ramadan.

"Ramadan is not only a time of avoiding consumption; it is about having the discipline to hold onto your faith regardless of the temptations that surround you," said an SJSWANA Instagram post about the die-in. "In letting your fasts justify your absence for your people, you are negating the point of those fasts to begin with. Palestinians do not have the luxury, the privilege, of resting throughout the day until iftar, and they certainly do not have the luxury nor privilege to break their fasts considering the Israeli-sanctioned and US-backed famine within Gaza. Go out and organize, and let the world know we all demand justice for Gaza, al-Aqsa, Palestinians and the entirety of Historic Palestine. From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."



Social Justice for South West Asia and North Africa (SJSWANA) during the March 22 die-in to raise awareness about the genocide of Palestinians at UNC Charlotte | Dan Rice/Niner Times

Hello Asia market fosters Asian community

ASIAN STUDENT ASSOCIATION MARKET MAKES A COMEBACK SINCE 2018

Sofia DiStefano | Asst. News Editor

The Asian Student Association's (ASA) annual Hello Asia market returned to UNC Charlotte's campus after six years with approximately 300 attendees.

The ASA Executive Board hosted the market to create an environment that promoted and celebrated Asian culture while bringing together the community. This year's market, held on March 17, was the first since 2018.

"It went pretty well. We were a bit nervous about the event because although we prepared a lot, this was the first time it happened in years, and we didn't really know what we were expecting. But it seemed like everyone was supportive. We had a great turnout, and things went pretty smoothly," said Tommy Vairo, third-year and public relations chair of ASA.

The Hello Asia market allowed ASA members and other students to indulge in various aspects of Asian culture in a fun and interactive way.

"As of right now, we're trying to bring more awareness. But at the same time, in order for us to bring more awareness, we've been trying to educate ourselves as much as possible," said Lena Mai, second-year and ASA president. "We went to the East Coast Asian American Conference and we learned a lot about the importance of having your Asian heritage and the importance of bringing that to the school. So, we want to have a larger impact at UNC Charlotte, making the Asian community here really strong and [ensuring] that [students] won't feel left out."

One of the organization's goals is to combat the negative stereotypes about the Asian community.

"We want to de-stigmatize some of the negative stereotypes that surround the Asian community and also provide insight into the different aspects of Asian culture from various parts of Asia," said Vairo. "As this is the Asian Student Association, there are many different regions of Asia that we want to exemplify."

The market included performances from various groups, vendors and activities.

ASA selected vendors who identified as Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI) for the Hello Asia market. These included Jelloh Doodles, Bubuski, Press-Ons By Sophia, Sanririta (Sanrio Vintage Goods) and Face Painting by Anushka.

"We asked for the vendors to be at least AAPI-identifying. So it didn't really matter what they sold. But if there was some sort of cultural aspect, for example, for the face painting, we didn't want to just be normal face painting," said Mai.

> **"We want to de-stigmatize some of the negative stereotypes that surround the Asian community and also provide insight into the different aspects of Asian culture from various parts of Asia."**
>
> **- Tommy Vairo,** *ASA public relations chair*

ASA is using what they learned from this year to plan the next market night.

"Next year, I would love to go out of Charlotte and support the Asian local businesses more and invite them to be a part of it," said Mai. [This year] we made the majority of the food ourselves, but thanks to the New Food Science Club, they also assisted by making Asian pastries with us. But obviously, we want to highlight and support the entire city of Charlotte."

As of spring 2024, ASA has 70-100 registered members in addition to their executive board. ASA's executive board has an event coordinator, design chair, community outreach and public relations chair in addition to the typical executive roles.

ASA allows members and executive board members to connect with their culture, enhancing their time at UNC Charlotte.

"Being able to join ASA and be exposed to the rich diversity of Asian culture has really made me feel at home with my own culture," said Vairo.

Organizations like ASA also provide leadership skills and learning opportunities and help students build a stronger work ethic.

"My college life experience [is] much better because you meet so many different people, not from the Asian Student Association, but there's also other clubs like VSA [Vietnamese Student Association], HSA [Hmong Student Association], so much more," said Mai. "Basically, we all have the same goal. So we try to work together as best as possible. And not only that, but it's kind of made me increase a lot of my skills, such as leadership, teamwork and understanding of the school's logistics and just the scene of the Asian community in UNCC, and understand how we can work better on it."

More information about ASA can be found on their Instagram, @cltasa.





The Asian Student Association (ASA) hosted the Hello Asia market on March 17, featuring performances, food and vendors. | Courtesy of ASA



Isaiah Grayson (right) and James Citrin (left) are the 2024-2025 student body president and vice president. | Sofia DiStefano/Niner Times

Isaiah Grayson and James Citrin named 2024-2025 student body president and vice president

Davis Cuffe & Sofia DiStefano | Asst. Sports Editor & Asst. News Editor

Isaiah Grayson was announced as 2024-2025 student body class president with his running mate James Citrin in a 56% to 44% win. Election results were announced in the Popp Martin Student Union on Thursday, March 21.

This year's Student Government Association (SGA) election saw 1,797 voters, the highest since 2020.

Grayson and Citrin ran on a "Charlotte. Over. Everything" platform, hoping to create a stronger academic and professional environment for Charlotte's student population. The two ran against DJ Green and Dede Effon.

"It was hard. It was a lot of work. We are excited and ready to serve and support the student body. It's a lot of emotions for sure," said Grayson.

Grayson-Citrin's next step is to work towards getting out in the community and connecting with the student body.

"We really need to ensure that we are talking to students on campus and getting engaged with the students a lot more than we have been as a student government. We need to represent like we are supposed to, and I think it's finally that time," said Grayson.

Grayson is a graduating third-year student double majoring in political science and history. In the fall, he will pursue a Master's in Public Administration. Before being elected president, he was the SGA vice president and the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences senator.

Citrin served as the upperclassman at large senator, internal affairs vice chair and junior class council member before being elected vice president.

"We really couldn't have done it without [the Charlotte community]. There's a reason our slogan is 'Charlotte. Over. Everything.' It's even over ourselves. Charlotte is really what matters," said Grayson.

The SGA spring elections included class presidents and other senator positions.

More information and future updates from Grayson and Citrin are on their Instagram, @grayson.citrin. SGA's Instagram, @clt_sga, will also feature more updates.

SGA spring elections full results

- Student Body President and Vice President: Isaiah Grayson and James Citrin
- William State Lee College of Engineering Senator: Matthew Kingsley
- Cato College of Education Senator: Kylie Greenelsh
- College of Humanities & Earth and Social Sciences Senator: Baran Narravula
- Underclassman at Large Senator: Dhanya Elsa James
- Upperclassman at Large Senator: Nassim Sahir
- Class Gift Campaign: Mental Health Awareness Fund
- Junior Class President: Emily Hoyle



From the UNC Charlotte Police Logs (March 17 - 22, 2024)

Sofia DiStefano | Asst. News Editor

The following are descriptions of some of the incidents in the UNC Charlotte campus police logs from March 16 to March 22, 2024.

March 16

Vehicle accident - Cameron Boulevard

Once on scene, officers observed a vehicle in the median lodged into a tree. The driver advised he was okay and declined medical attention. An officer detected the odor of alcohol emanating from their person, and as a result, a field sobriety test was performed. Shortly thereafter, the driver was arrested for DUI. The driver was transported to Atrium for evaluation/blood draw. After being cleared by medic, the suspect was conveyed to Mecklenburg County Intake.

March 17

Welfare check - Witherspoon Hall

Dispatch received communication in regard to a welfare check request at Witherspoon Hall. The reporting person stated he was unable to contact his daughter who had a medical condition which may render her unconscious. Upon arrival, officers located the student in the room breathing but unresponsive. Medic arrived on scene and administered glucose which immediately improved her health. Transport to Atrium for further care was declined.

March 18

Larceny - Friday

Dispatch received a call from an UNCC student to the Friday building in regard to a Larceny of an e-scooter. An officer responded and met with the student who stated she left her scooter on the first floor momentarily and went to the second floor; upon her return she found the e-scooter missing.

Welfare check - Robinson Hall

Dispatch received a call from a student's parent in regard to a Welfare Check of a possible suicidal resident student in Robinson Hall. Officers responded and met with a UNCC student who stated his mother called on his behalf to check on a UNCC student who was experiencing a mental crisis and had suicidal thoughts. Later on, officers learned the distressed student was the 2nd party from the previous call involving the termination of a romantic relationship. Officers transported the student to the Counseling Center and, consequently, to the Novant mental health facility in Uptown Charlotte.

Suspicious person - North Deck

Dispatch received a call to North Deck in regard to two individuals going up the deck with a long telescope device, possibly a camera lens, with their face covered up. Officers responded and canvassed the area but were unable to locate the individuals.

Loitering/trespassing - Light Rail

Officers responded to the Light Rail after their communications notified our dispatch of a female their security trespassed from the train at the UNCC station. Officers responded to monitor it and make sure no foul play was done.

Suspicious vehicle - Lot 20

Officers responded to Lot 20 after security for Witherspoon Hall called dispatch and stated there was a car in the lot with its driver-side door open. Officers located the vehicle and secured the door. Dispatch notified the owner of the vehicle, a resident student, and alerted her of the circumstances. The student responded to the vehicle and decided that no foul play had taken place.

March 19

Welfare check - Denny

UNC Charlotte Police Dept. received an email from a concerned student regarding possible cyberbullying of a fellow student. Officers made contact with the student who stated he was not being cyber bullied, harassed nor hazed. The student was given UNCC resources should he need them at a later time.

Larceny - Hunt Hall

Dispatch received a call from a student in regard to a larceny at Hunt Hall. An officer responded and met with the student, who stated he parked his bike and secured it with a chain. The student stated that today he found the front end missing.

Investigative - Student Union

While conducting a foot patrol of the Student Union, an officer observed an individual who resembled someone previously trespassed. The suspect was identified as a non-student who had previously been trespassed. The individual was transported to Atrium for evaluation and then to Mecklenburg County Jail.

March 20

Suspicious Person - East Deck

Dispatch sent out a BOLO for a suspicious person that had a crowbar in his hand. The suspicious person threw a drink at the caller and then ran towards the East Decks. Officers that were in the area checked the East Decks but were unable to locate the suspicious person.

March 21

Investigate - Student Union

Officers responded to the Student Union in reference to a larceny. Officers met with staff who stated a young male attempted to steal from the Amazon store but was unsuccessful because staff scared him away. Officers canvassed the area but were unable to locate the individual.

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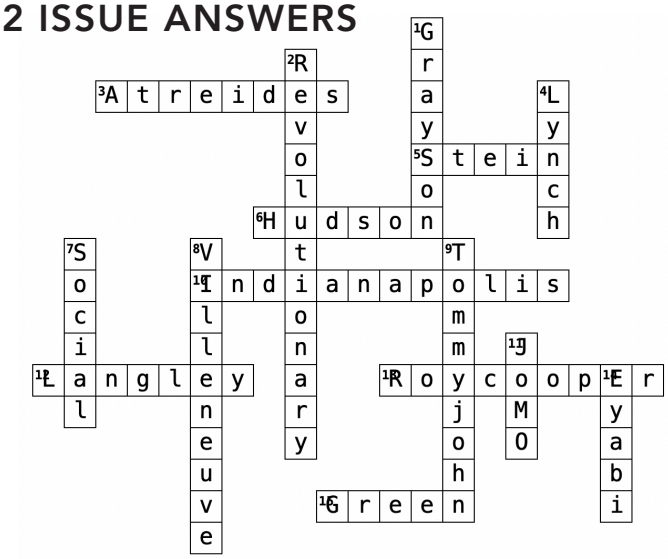
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CHECK THE NEXT REGULAR ISSUE (4/10) FOR THE ANSWERS TO THIS WEEK'S CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU!

NINER TIMES SUDOKU

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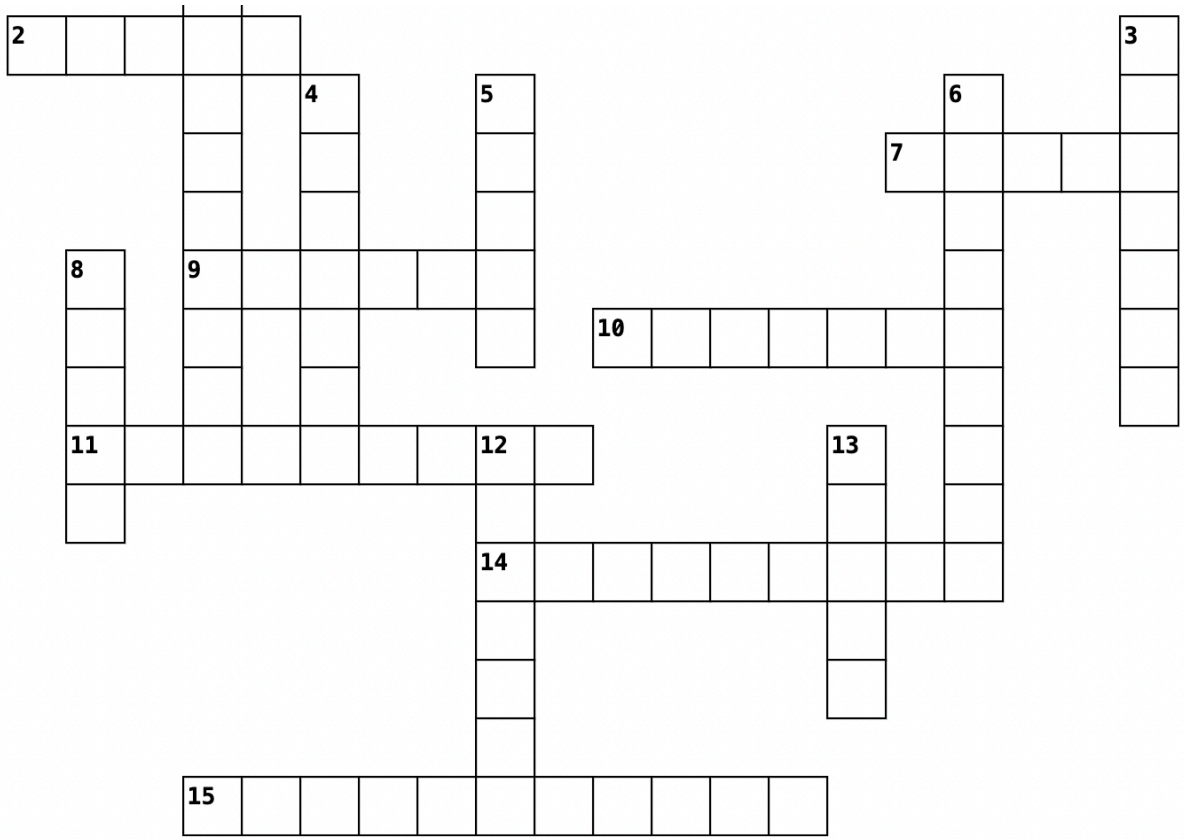
3/12 ISSUE ANSWERS



5	2	1	9	3	8	4	7	6
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1	4	5	8	9	3	7	6	2
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DID YOU KNOW?

CICADAS WILL ONLY EMERGE WHEN THE GROUND IS EXACTLY 64 DEGREES FAHRENHEIT.



NINER TIMES CROSSWORD

Across

2. Rebekah ____ Melocik, one of the writers for the musical "How to Dance in Ohio"
7. ____ Calligraphy Club
9. Oliver ___, president of the of the Shodo Calligraphy Club
10. Morgan Wallen song that is Arianna Rodi's walk-on song
11. Cato College of Education Senator Kylie _____
14. Minority vote count in the Senate on the bill to ban TikTok
15. N.C. representative with criticism for his stance on the TikTok ban

Down

1. One of the two advancing teams from the March Madness tournament at the Spectrum Center
3. Found in the hands of a suspicious person in East Deck on March 20
4. Winner of student body president position
5. Tommy ____, public relations chair of ASA
6. "Why not _____?," slogan for UNC Charlotte disc golf
8. Dr. Emilio ____, therapist of documentary and musical "How to Dance in Ohio"
12. One of the student organizations that participated in the March 22 die-in
13. Student ____, place where an officer arrested a suspicious individual for trespassing on March 19

Crossword by Niner Times Editorial Board

South Asian Student Association hosts Holi

Photos by Dan Rice | Asst. Photo Editor

On March 22, the South Asian Student Association hosted Holi, the festival of colors, spring and love. Holi is the most significant Hindu holiday that marks the beginning of spring.















Let's talk Greek fashion

HOW ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA AND ZETA PHI BETA REPRESENT THEIR ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH COLORS AND APPAREL

Akilah Abdulraheem | Contributor

For the historically African American sororities in the Divine Nine, fashion plays a major role in identifying each organization while also recognizing its history. This includes their colors, letters and apparel.

Kennedy Jeffers and Jazmine Chance discuss the significance of fashion within their respective organizations: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.

"It's important to be able to recognize an organization that's bigger than myself and be able to show the history of what these letters mean," said Chance, president of the Upsilon Xi chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority. "[It is] a good representation of who I am and what I value towards my personal self. At the end of the day, I take [the letters and apparel] off, and I'm the same person. So it's just a matter of importance to me because I get to represent something bigger than me that goes along with my core values."

Alpha Kappa Alpha's colors are pink and green, and Zeta Phi Beta's are royal blue and white, which they share with their brother fraternity, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.

The colors of each sorority within the Divine Nine also highlight the beliefs of the founders and organization.

"It goes back to the history of when our organization was founded. Our founder believed that those colors were very flattering to women. They are very presentable colors for working, going on campus, and going out and doing other things," said Jeffers, a member of the Kappa Kappa Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority.

For Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, the colors were a conscious decision made by the sorority's founders.

"What they believed is that we [should] hold ourselves up to a very high standard, presenting ourselves very well [and] making sure we're very well kept," said Jeffers. "At the end of the day, our sorority is associated with very social things, but it's still considered a business. We wanted to make sure that we upheld our standards for whenever we went out and certain attire to make sure we looked appropriate."

The colors of Alpha Kappa Alpha set them apart from other sororities and fraternities within the Divine Nine.

"I know every Greek org has their own colors, but ours is what makes us stand out from everybody else," said Jeffers. "I have a black pullover that has a pink and green 1908 on it. Or I'll have a green pullover with pink and green 1908 numbers. But when you see the pink and green, you know that either she's an AKA or she's a part of the sorority in some way."

While the colors remain, the style of clothing has changed over time.

For Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, members of this organization used to wear dresses and pearls actively. Now, members are free to dress how they would like while still being conscious of how they represent their sorority.

"It's very different now because before, it was dresses, fur, pearls and no pants. It comes from the definition of what 'finer' means because finer womanhood is one of our principles, and we have to dress to a standard of what finer is," said Chance.

How often members wear apparel that represents their organization differs. Many wear it at chapter meetings and events or whenever they feel comfortable.

"Personally, whenever I feel it, I just want to throw it on. I like to wear other clothes as well. But on days I want to represent Zeta for that day, I just throw it on and feel comfortable," said Chance.

With the choice to wear apparel whenever they please, there is also a designated day to wear and represent one's sorority. Other times, members wear sorority apparel during Greek events such as the yearly stroll competition and the 'Meet the Greeks' event.

"We do it every week, on Tuesdays currently. It varies from semester to semester; last semester, we did it every Tuesday and Thursday. Right now, we're just doing Tuesdays. And we do it whenever we have any programs and events going on," said Chance.





Alpha Kappa Alpha at the 2022 annual Yard Show (top) and Zeta Phi Beta members at an event (bottom)
Meadow Pacheco/Niner Times File and courtesy of Zet Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.

Shodo Calligraphy Club's return to campus

HOW THE CLUB PROMOTES JAPANESE CULTURE FOLLOWING ITS REVIVAL AFTER THE PANDEMIC

Nick Caceres | Staff Writer

Since its recent revival, the Shodo Calligraphy Club has been a hub for Japanese art, language and culture at UNC Charlotte. The club is open to anyone curious about further understanding the topic and wants to enjoy Japanese media with like-minded individuals.

The club gathers weekly to practice calligraphy with paper and ink and learn about each word's history and linguistic context. For spring 2024, meetings are every Wednesday between 4:30 and 5:30 p.m. in COED 419.

"My favorite aspect of the club is being able to do something artistic and pretty," said Chase Chiswell, a fourth-year member of the club double majoring in computer science and Japanese. "It's a great way to relax and unwind during a stressful week."

Gladiz De La Rosa feels that the interest in the club can be attributed to the types of Japanese and Asian media that have gained significant popularity in the past decade.

"I think you should join this club if you're interested in learning more about Japanese culture, bettering your calligraphy skills or if you're just looking for a good time because that's what a lot of people describe it as when they come," said De La Rosa, a fourth-year international studies and Japanese Studies double major and secretary of Shodo Club. "Often, they won't even be a part of a Japanese class or even know anything about Japanese culture, but they'll appreciate the vibes that we create."

Outside of calligraphy practice, the club often gathers to enjoy other Japanese media, ranging from classic anime films and shows. They also hold other events and recently participated in a multi-language poetry slam.

While Shodo Club is not new to the University, it had gone inactive because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Members, including Oliver Snyder, the current president, had to revive the organization once back on campus.

"Part of it was going from in-person before COVID to virtual," said Snyder. "So things got lost along the transition between officers and how they ran it because the way we run it today with our staff is a lot different from how I experienced Shodo Club when my friend was president."

The club has also experienced a renaissance with the help of the Japanese language program. Professors within the department encourage students to use student organizations, like Shodo Club, to practice the language in a laid-back environment and earn extra credit.

"I think every Japanese language course does that, especially if you're in the beginning Japanese classes," said Snyder. "You need to memorize the first two alphabets, which are Hiragana and Katakana, and the only way you can do that is through repetition."

Japanese classes were how Chiswell first found out about the Shodo Club.

"I joined the club back in 2022 after hearing about it from the teachers of the Japanese classes I was taking," said Chiswell.

UNC Charlotte currently provides a Japanese major, minor, certificate in business Japanese and certificate in translating Japanese-English through the Department of Languages and Culture Studies.

"We have one of the only translation programs which is pretty unique," said Johanna Marcial Velaquez, a fourth-year psychology major with a minor in Japanese and vice president of Shodo Club. "That brings a lot of people looking to study Japanese for the purpose of translation, which attracts a lot of people looking to conduct business in Japan."



Dragon art by Kai Reichow from a November Shodo Club meeting | Courtesy of Shodo Club



Courtesy of 'How to Dance in Ohio'

'How to Dance in Ohio' deserved its place on Broadway

Lauren Simendinger | Staff Writer

"How to Dance in Ohio" may have closed on Feb. 11, but its legacy will last far longer.

The musical features a group of autistic young adults preparing for a spring formal put on by their therapist, and it is based on the 2015 documentary of the same name. Autism has been tackled by the stage before, but this is the first time autistic characters have been played by openly autistic actors.

It is quite rare for autism to be portrayed positively on stage and screen, much less involving actual autistic people in the role. Most portrayals rely heavily on stereotypes: a young, cisgender, white male who is anti-social and a genius. The Tony-winning 2015 play "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" fits this trope. They also tend to promote dangerous treatment of autistic people, such as in the movie "Music" (2021), with its prone restraint scene. And, of course, the autistic character is never played by an actual autistic person.

But "How to Dance in Ohio" ("Ohio" for short) rejects all these fronts, telling the story of various characters, Black, white, Latino, Asian, male, female and nonbinary alike.

What makes "Ohio" stand out is that not only does it avoid caricatures, but the actors are not portraying mere characters at all. Every character is a real person whose experiences and input are valued and help shape the story told onstage. The musical is not just an autism story, nor is it about them preparing for the dance. Yes, this is the overarching plot, but the show also discusses the mundane struggles of the young adults' lives. Their struggles are realistic for someone autistic but not isolated strictly in this realm. It centers their lives and grounds them in reality. It treats them like any other character in a musical, any other person in life.

"We acknowledge that 'How to Dance in Ohio' does not represent the entirety of the multifaceted word 'autism' and what it means to be neurodivergent or disabled," says a statement on the show's website. "It's often said that 'autism is one word to describe millions of different stories.' We bring this musical and these seven characters to our audience not as a representation of all neurodiversity but from the perspective that this show aims to start a broader conversation regarding autism, disability, and inclusion in the commercial theater industry."

"Ohio's" mantra is "Nothing about us without us." This statement is groundbreaking in and of itself. Not only are autistic audience members seen on stage, but behind the stage, too. They see that their art and contribution to it are just as valuable as the neurotypical playwrights who have ruled Broadway. However, the musical's writer and composer — Rebekah Greer Melocik and Jacob Yandura — are neurotypical themselves.

Yandura first found the documentary while scrolling through HBO. It immediately spoke to him, and he reached out to Melocik. Together, they visited the real-life therapist, Dr. Emilio Amigo, and dance participants to answer questions. Everyone on the creative team was committed to casting autistic actors and took care to ensure the rehearsal space and production catered to their needs.

For many, seeing the musical was the first time they felt truly represented. Critics and audience members alike have praised the show for its groundbreaking representation and inclusion.

"Groundbreaking. Thoughtful and poetic. This feel-good show is a milestone," said the New York Times's Jesse Green in his review.

Yet, despite all this praise, "Ohio" closed not even two months after its opening.

There are many speculations as to why, with most attributing it to the economic struggles many shows faced after the Broadway shutdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Deadline reported that the week of Jan. 14 had the musical earning a mere $387,318 and filling only 63% of their seats. The show did face many critiques, with some saying the score was bland and generic and others saying the marketing only focused on the autistic cast and didn't provide enough insight into the actual story of the show.

However, the show has proved to be anything but generic. It gave compassion, respect, and humanity to those who are often denied it. It gave audiences visibility and hope.

To see Broadway, an institution that prides itself on diversity, innovation and inclusion, get rid of "Ohio" so easily is disappointing. Maybe Broadway wasn't the place for it. Maybe it did need better marketing. Perhaps the music wasn't anything special. But "How to Dance in Ohio" is, and it matters. And hopefully, its future holds something even more extraordinary than its presence.

Uncertainty surrounding TikTok ban further proves Americans' distrust toward government

Ruhshona Soledjonova & Jaden Hartfield | Opinion Editor & Staff Writer

The House passing the bill to ban TikTok does not yet mean that TikTok is completely banned. However, the government's lack of concern for more critical issues plaguing the country is frustrating and increases distrust between the public and politicians.

The bill to ban TikTok passed the House 352-65 on March 13 and is now in the hands of the Senate. There is hope that the Senate will see TikTok's value.

Background on the ban

The House bill to ban TikTok passed following lawmakers' concerns that the app posed a threat to national security. The lawmakers believe that the Chinese government can use American data gained from TikTok for their intelligence network against the United States.

TikTok and their parent company, ByteDance, have stated that the Chinese government has not asked for the data gained from their servers and would not comply if done so. Their statements did not alleviate lawmakers' worries, as they are calling for ByteDance to sell TikTok within 165 days for the app to continue to be used in the United States.

Debunks and distrust

Ever since September 2016, when TikTok was first launched in the U.S., government officials have been skeptical about privacy within the app and its U.S. users.

TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew explained in a video that the company has made efforts to minimize privacy concerns for years.

"Over the last few years, we have invested to keep your data safe in our platform, free from outside manipulation; we have committed that we will continue to do so," said Chew in a CNBC article.

For decades, the lack of trust in politicians has rapidly increased as the list of bills that do not represent the voice of American citizens rises. More importantly, politicians like Jeff Jackson are seen as hypocrites between their social media platforms and their votes towards the bill.

Jackson serves as U.S. representative for North Carolina's 14th congressional district. His role in the banning of TikTok is confusing and defeating because he has a platform of 2.3 million followers and is active on the app. Jackson previously used TikTok to promote his campaign for Attorney General and showcase his political stance. Oddly, he voted for the banning of the app.

To clarify the situation, Jackson posted a follow-up video. According to TIME Magazine, "If I were in your shoes, I would probably feel the same way. I would see someone who used this app to build a following and appears to have voted against it, and I would be upset," said Jackson.

Users and voters were outraged by this response. Jackson used the app's 'alarming features' as an excuse to justify his vote. If the ban was solely to protect the data collection of Americans, companies like Meta and X should be banned, too. TikTok helps build small businesses and highlights marginalized communities more than any other social media platform.

This continuous clash between public opinion and government rulings is only making matters worse for the 2024 election year. There is a steady decline of trust in our representatives and this increases negative attitudes going into elections.

The government's misdirected focus

Even though TikTok's ban is not set in stone, this is what the government is prioritizing and giving their attention to, which is harmful to the other United States issues plaguing the country.

Aniah Mayfield, a concerned Charlotte resident, expressed her frustration with the government, stating that they are "worried about the wrong issues at hand."

"There are many other issues that the government should be worrying about, but my top concern is gun violence and gun control. There are way too many school shootings happening that could possibly be prevented if there were more rules on buying a gun for one's self," said Mayfield.

Based on the events that occurred in recent years, Mayfield's concerns are justified. There has been an increase in school shootings in the United States since the shooting at Columbine High School in 1999.

Charlotte has experienced multiple occasions of gun violence, like the April 30, 2019 tragedies and, most recently, threats such as the Feb. 1, 2024, false active shooter. These occasions, along with numerous incidents at universities, constantly jeopardize students' safety and are concerns that should be focused heavily on the government, not the banning of TikTok.

There are even TikTokers with huge platforms that are voicing their dissatisfaction with the app's banishment over other pressing issues in the United States, such as user Alex Pearlman, known as Pearlmania500, who has accumulated 2.5 million followers on the platform.

"The only thing that all 535 members of this Congress could agree on is to ban TikTok. That's it. That's the only thing I heard," said Pearlman. "Talked about raising the minimum wage. Can't federally agree on that. Heard them talk about trying to keep prescription drug prices low for people. Nope, can't agree on that."

The voices of creators on the app can not be taken for granted. By banning TikTok, those voices are being denied their right to freedom of speech and expression, which has been a prominent attraction for many to use the app.



Lauren Steventon/Niner Times

Charlotte disc golf asks, 'Why not Charlotte?'

Davis Cuffe | Asst. Sports Editor

Charlotte Club Disc Golf is amid a historic season and has a bright future, thanks to new baskets near Martin Hall.

The Charlotte men's disc golf team is currently ranked No. 1 in the nation and has won eight of their nine matches this season. Charlotte's women's disc golf team is not far behind, ranked No. 14 nationally. The two teams will compete in the upcoming College Disc Golf National Championship in Rock Hill, S.C., at Winthrop University on April 3.

Their slogan this year has been "Why not Charlotte?" With the depth and strength of both men's and women's teams, the team has a chance to win all three men's and women's divisions at the national championship, which has never been done before.

Strong bond

The team maintains a rigorous practice schedule and has created a bond that rivals any other team on campus.

"Everyone knows everyone. There are only about 25 of us on the team that plays consistently; it's like a small family," said fourth-year Lauren Bourque.

New baskets

For these 49ers, practice often involves throwing through entire courses or working on specific shots to improve. Until recently, they practiced exclusively at disc golf courses in Charlotte. This meant they often conflicted with other teams in the area and had to deal with travel troubles like moving equipment and long drives.

Adding new baskets around campus eases these difficulties and will improve the program.

"This is a major step for our club. Our team is going to utilize this every day for the next several years," said Danny Hamilton, a third-year.

Along with helping with practice, the baskets will raise awareness of disc golf's relevance in the area. Charlotte is known to many as one of the top disc golf spots in the world.

"I think [the new baskets] gonna totally elevate the college club team and bring awareness to the actual college," said Ricky Jones, a member of Charlotte's facilities management team who helped install the baskets. "There are people who move from all over the country to the Charlotte region just to play disc golf."

Rice's success

This reputation drew second-year student Owen Rice, one of the country's best players, to Charlotte.

"I came to Charlotte for disc golf," said Rice. "This city is pretty much known as the number one city in the country for disc golf; I really want to be able to bring a championship here."

> **"This city is pretty much known as the number one city in the country for disc golf; I really want to be able to bring a championship here."**
>
> **- Owen Rice,** *second-year member*

Rice recently turned professional after picking up disc golf in his junior year of high school. According to the Professional Disc Golf Association's website, he has 16 career individual wins.

"Sometimes schoolwork takes a backseat [to disc golf]. My parents don't want me to say that, but it does," said Rice.

Nationals

The upcoming national meet will be the teams' most significant challenge yet. The men's team will rematch with North Carolina State University (NCSU), a division rival and the nation's No. 3 ranked team. Charlotte defeated NCSU earlier this season but will now face them on a new course.

The women's team faces an uphill climb to a possible championship. To reach their championship aspirations, they must dethrone No. 1 ranked Emporia State University.

Despite the challenge, the 49ers are confident in their success at nationals.

"We've shown all season we can do it; as long as we stay composed, we have it in the bag," said Rice.

The team has already practiced at the national course at Winthrop this year and plans to make more trips to further familiarize themselves.

Raising awareness

Looking to the program's future, success this season and the new baskets means disc golf may continue to rise. Awareness on campus is the teams' biggest obstacle in continuing their success.

"A lot of people just don't even know about it, and we are the number one city in the world for it [disc golf]," said Hamilton. "We hope to push to get a full 18 holes on campus so that people can learn more about the sport."



Norm the Niner poses for a picture with representing members of Charlotte Club Disc Golf at a new basket installed near Martin Hall. | Sunnya Hadavi/Niner Times

Arianna Rodi leads nationally-ranked Charlotte softball in 2024

Sam Perry | Staff Writer

Charlotte's softball team is off to a hot start this season. They are currently ranked No. 21 by D1Softball.com, largely due to the emergence of sophomore first baseman Arianna Rodi, who has become a power bat in the lineup.

Setting the tone

The 49ers softball team started the season with a bang, defeating the then-ranked No. 4 Florida State University. Rodi contributed two hits, including a home run, in a 6-5 win on Feb. 8.

The win set the tone for the season, as the team has secured victories over three top-15-ranked opponents thus far.

"In the moment, we were just trying to stay cool, calm and collected. Then, once that last out was made and we won, then we were able to let the emotions come out," said Rodi. "It was electric, and everyone was just so happy. We knew that all the work we'd put in from the second we stepped foot in August all the way through, it was finally starting to click for us, and people started to realize that we were good enough to hang with any team in the country."

Approach at the plate

After playing in 27 games her freshman season and starting 11, Rodi has embraced a more prominent role. She has played and started in all but one game for the 49ers this season. Rodi has risen to the occasion, increasing her batting average by 161 points.

On the season, Rodi is leading the team in batting average, hitting .366 (27-74), home runs (10), RBI (26) and walks (19) while also scoring 14 runs and hitting three doubles.

Rodi's 50% on-base rate this season reflects her successful plate approach, where she waits for a pitch she wants or draws a walk.

"Honestly, it's just to make sure that they throw a strike. I'm not going to chase them out of the zone," said Rodi. "I'm going to make them throw over the 17 inches of the plate. And then I'm just going to swing hard and try to put the ball in hard and play hard."

A walk-up song is vital to getting a batter in the right mindset and ready to go as they head to the batter's box. Rodi has two that have served her well at the plate and gets Sue M. Daughtridge stadium, or "the Sioux," excited. Her songs are "Cowgirls" by Morgan Wallen and "White Horse" by Chris Stapleton.

"White Horse means a lot more to me just because my family loves that song, and my godparents who live down here in Charlotte and all my family who live down here love that song," said Rodi. And then 'Cowgirls' was just an upbeat country song. So I figured that would get the Sioux rocking."

Rodi in the clutch

While Rodi may excite the Sioux with her music, she electrifies the crowd with her powerful hitting, especially in crucial moments.

On March 2, against the then-ranked No. 14 University of Kentucky, the 49ers were down to their final out and down two in the bottom of the seventh inning. Rodi stepped up to the plate with two runners on base with the opportunity to save the game.

Rodi took the first pitch for a ball. On the next pitch, she sent a ball flying to right field. It went over the fence for a walk-off home run.

"I mean, just getting able to round second and third base and just see my teammates just charging out of the dugout and see my coaches is so ecstatic," said Rodi. "I was happy I could come through in that moment, but I know if it was any other person on the team, we'd all would have reacted the same way. We're just such a big family, and being able to share big moments like that means a lot to all of us."

Top first baseman

Softball America named Rodi the No. 1 first baseman in its March positional rankings.

"It meant a lot," said Rodi. "I'm truly honored. Honestly, it just makes me want to keep working harder. My goal is just to keep pushing and try to stay on the rankings every month. It's really good motivation to know that people are seeing the recognition of the hard work I put in, but also the recognition of the team itself with the hard work that we've all put in."

Keys to success

Rodi credits her progression from last year to honing in on the game's mental aspects in the offseason and learning to bounce back when things do not go as she had envisioned.

"I had a lot of growing up to do from my freshman year and my sophomore year," said Rodi. "The physical side, I knew, was going to come along just with age and getting used to the practices, the games and all the physical demands, but my mental side, knowing that you're going to have failures at this high of a level. How to persevere through the failures and that everything's going to be okay. If you failed, you just have to keep pushing through and don't always have to press the panic button."



Charlotte's star sophomore utility player Arianna Rodi (20) prepares herself for an at bat in a matchup with Virginia Tech University. | Dan Rice/Niner Times

Rodi's offseason training has paid off. She is leading a Charlotte softball team that is making a lot of noise in its first year in the American Athletic Conference (AAC).

Early AAC success

After facing difficult nonconference opponents, Charlotte has rolled into the new conference. They currently are 5-1 in AAC play and recently swept the University of Memphis.

"We tested ourselves with our preseason schedule," said Rodi. "So we knew that we could take on any team coming into this conference. Going into that first weekend, we just wanted to take care of business and put our stamp on the American conference."

NCAA Tournament brings excitement to the Spectrum Center

Itza Ochoa & Kelli Blackburn | Sports Editor & Staff Writer

For the third time in the past decade, the Spectrum Center hosted the first and second rounds of the NCAA men's basketball tournament for the 2023-24 season. With eight teams traveling from across the country, fans filled Charlotte for March Madness.

Charlotte's basketball identity

While bids to become a host in this year's tournament were submitted years ago, the UNC Charlotte Athletic Department collaborated with the Spectrum Center, Charlotte Hornets, Charlotte Sports and the Charlotte Regional Visitors' Authority to bring excitement back to the city.

"March Madness brings our nation together like almost no other sporting event," said Mike Hill, the Charlotte 49ers' athletic director, in an interview with The Charlotte Observer. "Basketball has such strong roots in this city, in this state and in our institution. It's really nice that we have the opportunity to showcase our city with our partners in the best light possible."

This commitment has been demonstrated over the past several years as Charlotte has recently hosted March Madness games in 2011, 2015 and 2018 while also presenting the East Regional in 2008.

The first and second rounds of the tournament held on March 21 and March 23 attracted over 18,000 fans each day, less than 2,000 seats short of reaching full capacity at the arena.

Eight teams, one stage

Charlotte welcomed six schools across the Atlantic Coast, Northeast, Big Ten, Big 12, Mountain West and Metro Atlantic Athletic Conferences and two from the Southeastern Conference.

Following the first four games, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), Michigan State University, the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UT) won their respective games and saw the light toward the second round taking place on March 23.

As only two teams could continue dancing, UNC and UT advanced to the Sweet 16, seeking their next victories in Los Angeles and Detroit on March 28-29, respectively.

More than just a game

UNC became the evident headliner for the Spectrum Center games. The Tar Heels earned a No. 1 seed and had a short journey of 140 miles, feeling like home games for the team. To some players, this game meant more than just a victory or defeat.

Graduate student forward Jae'Lyn Withers performed in front of his hometown as a fellow graduate from North Mecklenburg High School in Huntersville, N.C. In the first-round game against Wagner College, Withers tallied 16 points, 10 rebounds, three assists and one steal.

"Having a double-double in front of a lot of my family members in the stands and contributing to the win is great," said Withers. "Doing that in the first game of the tournament is definitely surreal."

Aside from UNC, UT also had two players on their roster from N.C., one of them being a part of the Triangle area in the city of Durham. Junior forward Jonas Aidoo dropped 15 points, six rebounds, three blocks and one assist against Saint Peters University on March 21.

Branding and recognition

Despite UNC Charlotte falling short of the NCAA tournament, the 49ers' Athletic Department pursued this event to bring attraction to the University. The 49ers' Executive Associate Athletics Director Ragean Hill and Associate Athletic Director for Media Relations Tom Whitestone were responsible over the last several years for coordinating the tournament.

"The branding value is really immeasurable; there's a lot of power in that," said Mike Hill. "We're an up-and-coming institution that is on the rise and doing big things. It's important to us, certainly on the local stage to be seen and on a national stage, we're excited about that opportunity."

As March Madness continues, UNC Charlotte's Athletic Department hopes to carry the excitement and attention toward future opportunities.



Senior UNC Chapel Hill guard RJ Davis (4) drives against University of Wagner defender in the Tar Heels' March 21 matchup. | Megan Bentley/Niner Times

CLT CHARLOTTE 49ERS SCOREBOARD

RECENT GAMES

MARCH 11- MARCH 24

MEN'S BASKETBALL

March 15: Temple 58, Charlotte 54

SOFTBALL

March 13: Charlotte 8, Virginia Tech 4
March 15: Charlotte 12, Memphis 7
March 16: Charlotte 9, Memphis 0
March 16: Charlotte 9, Memphis 0
March 17: Charlotte 6, Memphis 0
March 20: Liberty 6, Charlotte 5
March 22: ECU 4, Charlotte 1

BASEBALL

March 15: Charlotte 21, UNCW 10
March 16: UNCW 13, Charlotte 2
March 17: UNCW 7, Charlotte 5
March 19: Davidson 9, Charlotte 3
March 20: Gardner-Webb 8, Charlotte 4
March 23: FAU 4, Charlotte 3
March 23: FAU 6, Charlotte 5
March 24: Charlotte 13, FAU 1

WOMEN'S TENNIS

March 15: Charlotte 4, Denver 3
March 17: Charlotte 4, Wichita State 0
March 22: Charlotte 4, SMU 3
March 24: South Florida 4, Charlotte 3

MEN'S TENNIS

Feb. 11: Charlotte 5, UAB 2
Feb. 16: Charlotte 5, South Carolina State 2
March 24: VCU 4, Charlotte 3

OVERALL STANDINGS

Baseball: 11-14, 1-2

Softball: 17-12, 6-3

Men's tennis: 11-5, 0-0

Women's tennis: 14-6, 2-1

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— Lt. Governor Mark Robinson



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