



NINERTIMES

Student-driven news since 1947 April 9, 2025

HANDS OFF!!

Charlotte rally draws thousands for march against Musk and Trump

MORE ON PAGE 8

NINERTIMES

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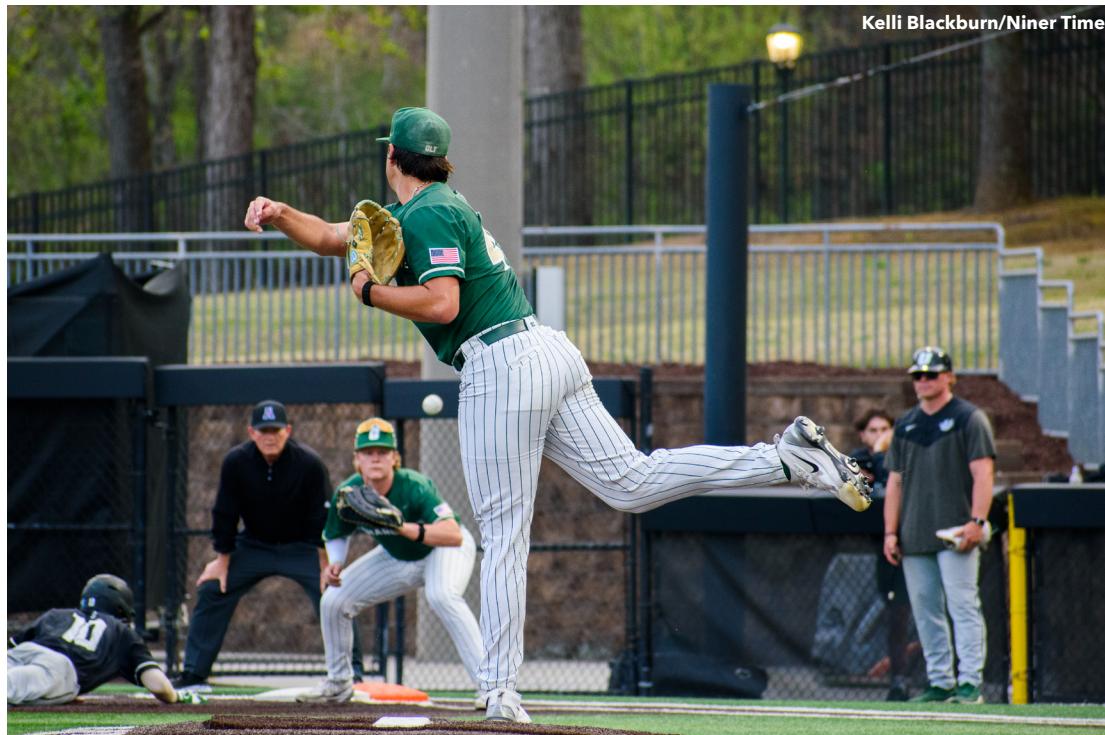
The Niner Times is UNC Charlotte's student-run news publication founded in 1947 and has received both state and national recognition.

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

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Events to watch for on and off campus

Baseball vs East Carolina April 11 6

P.M.
Truist Field

UNC Charlotte Robot Rumble April

12 10 A.M. - 6 P.M.
Belk Gymnasium

Intramurals Field Day Tournament

April 16 11:30 A.M.
NRFC

Pride Prom
April 12 8-10 P.M.
Cone Center After Hours

Consent Carnival April 15 4:30-7:30
P.M.
SoVI Terrace

Botanical Gardens Spring Plant Sale
April 10-12 times varying
Lot 5

NOTES FROM THE NEWSROOM: The Botanical Gardens are more than a shortcut

Brendan Mullen | Writing Managing Editor



On Mary Alexander lies a small sign that reads "Botanical Gardens," marking the entrance to a wide gravel trail, and a key shortcut for students. This path, home to a steady beating of foot traffic, connects campus hubs to student-life locations.

Although convenient walkways are appreciated, there is a much more pressing concern that lies beyond a matter of shortening the commute between buildings. In

this constant flow of traffic, the "Botanical Gardens" feels like a faint label slapped on a busy highway.

Hurried steps neglect hidden beauty that lies off the main path, for the Botanical Gardens, and everywhere. This inattention mirrors an alarming trend: the rapid shrinking of our green areas on campus from construction and our ever-expanding University.

This well-worn shortcut, serves as a quiet commentary on how easily

we can overlook the inherent value of spaces when our own needs take center stage. So, stop for a moment, look up from your phone and smell the azaleas. Take out your headphones and, instead, listen to birdsong in the Susie Hardwood Gardens. Have a moment of quiet reflection at the koi pond. Find solace from your stress in a fern. Appreciate the natural beauty that surrounds you before it slips away into the bustle of everyday life.

From the Charlotte police logs (3/30 - 4/4)

Eve Goldman | Asst. News Editor

The following are descriptions of some incidents in the UNC Charlotte campus police logs from March 30 to April 4, 2025.

March 31 Missing person

A woman stated her family were there to watch their daughter's performance. Their juvenile daughter stayed in the car to nap. When they returned to the vehicle, she was not inside. Officers searched the campus until she returned to the vehicle.

April 1 Serving papers

Officers gave an Apex County arrest warrant to a university employee. The employee was detained and transported without incident to Mecklenburg County Intake.

April 3 Suspicious person

Dispatch received a call about a student hopping over the fence and entering Sanford Hall. The student was charged with first-degree trespassing and resist, delay and obstruct for trying to run away.

Small-town standout Noah Furcht poised to lead Charlotte baseball to success

Max Alexander | Staff Writer

For Charlotte senior outfielder Noah Furcht, baseball has always been about more than just the game. From his roots in Esko, Minn., to junior college and now Division I baseball, Furcht's journey has been defined by perseverance, adaptability and a love for competition.

Furcht transferred to Charlotte from Kirkwood Community College in 2023 and quickly emerged as one of the team's top leaders. In his senior season, he currently leads the 49ers with five home runs and holds a .286 batting average.

Growing up in Esko, a small town in northeastern Minnesota with roughly 2,000 people, Furcht quickly developed a passion for baseball.

He kept up with the Minnesota Twins, and his love for the game grew as he idolized Twins legend Joe Mauer. While Mauer's left-handed swing differed from Furcht's right-handed approach, his professionalism and work ethic left a lasting impression.

In the tight-knit community where Furcht grew up, baseball and high school sports were a significant part of local culture, which played a major role in shaping his competitive spirit.

He attended Esko High School, where he was a standout athlete. Playing for a small program meant he had to take on many roles around the diamond, including pitching, playing the infield and eventually settling into the outfield.

"Playing different positions gives you a feel for the game in different

ways," said Furcht. "Even as an outfielder now, I can understand what the pitcher, infielder and catcher are thinking."

His versatility on the field and leadership qualities made him a key player for the team. Furcht's performances caught the attention of college recruiters, but coming from a small school, he knew he had to prove himself at the next level before earning a shot at Division I baseball.

Furcht graduated from Esko and transitioned his athletic career to Kirkwood in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Junior college baseball can be a grind, with limited resources and intense competition. Players must often prove themselves daily, balancing rigorous schedules while striving for a chance to advance.

"I came from a small high school, so I didn't really know what college baseball was about," said Furcht. "Junior college was a stepping stone that helped me learn what I needed to do to get to this level."

His time in junior college earned him two First Team All-Conference and All-Region Iowa Community College Athletic Conference (ICCAC) honors, which played a crucial role in preparing him for Division I competition.

In 2023, Furcht committed to Charlotte, where his preparation and work ethic finally paid off.

Moving across the country—from Minnesota to Iowa to North Carolina—was a significant transition for Furcht, but he embraced the opportunity.

"I went to junior college first, so I was a little far from home, but not as far as here," said Furcht. "I just love baseball, so I wanted to go wherever I could play at the highest level."

On game days, music sets the tone for Furcht. A mix of Waylon Jennings—his father's favorite—heavy metal and calmer tunes help him stay focused.

Furcht also brings a strong commitment to excellence that extends beyond the diamond. He was named to the College Sports Communicators Academic All-District Team during the 2024 season, a testament to his discipline.

"Time management is crucial," said Furcht. "Planning when to get school work done and when to focus on baseball is a big part of being a student-athlete."

As an upperclassman, Furcht takes pride in mentoring younger teammates.

"My role is to build those guys up," said Furcht. "If they're struggling, I'm there to help. If they're doing well, I remind them to

have fun with it."

From March 21–23, Charlotte opened American Athletic Conference play against the University of Texas at San Antonio. Despite Furcht launching a home run, the 49ers dropped the series 1-2. Rather than dwelling on the losses, the team is focused on growth.

With conference play underway, Furcht sees plenty of potential for the 49ers.

"We've shown what we can do, and we'll keep learning and growing," said Furcht. "Plus, traveling is always fun—seeing new places and hanging out with teammates."

As the season unfolds, Furcht's resilience and leadership will be vital to Charlotte's success. His journey from a small-town star to a key contributor at the Division I level is a testament to his work ethic and passion for the game.

For young athletes from small communities, Furcht offers simple yet powerful advice.

"Don't limit yourself," said Furcht. "Look at it as an opportunity to prove you can make it anywhere. Just believe and keep pushing."

Furcht is poised to make a lasting impact both on and off the field. As the 49ers push forward in conference play, they will rely on his steady presence and competitive spirit to help them chase their goals.



Kelli Blackburn/Niner Times

Steve Moore/Niner Times

Emmanuel Perkins/Niner Times

Men's basketball forced to rebuild amidst continued transfer portal losses and NCAA shift

Davis Cuffe & Ian Shure | Editor-in-Chief & Staff Writer

With Charlotte men's basketball season coming to a close and the transfer portal opening up, so do questions for the 49er's future.

The 49ers finished the season at 11-22 overall and 3-15 in conference play, a step back from the prior season where Charlotte went 19-12 and 13-5.

Yet following a season marked by regression, Charlotte has seen major losses to the transfer portal. And now for the fourth straight season, Charlotte has lost their leading scorer to the transfer portal with junior guard Nik Graves opting to transfer.

The losses

In just the first three days after the transfer portal's opening on March 24, Graves, junior guard Jaehshon Thomas and redshirt sophomore forward Rich Rolf entered the portal, opting to leave Charlotte. Redshirt senior forward Jeremiah Oden followed the trio in transferring.

Adding to the losses from the transfer portal, Charlotte had six players graduate. The biggest names are forwards Giancarlo Rosado and Robert Braswell IV, both of whom were major contributors for Charlotte as their second and third-leading scorers.

These departures leave Charlotte with just three returning players heading into the 2025-2026 season.

Of the 10 players opting to transfer or graduating, nine are ranked within Charlotte's top 10 in points, rebounds, assists and minutes per game. The No. 10 player not within that top 10 was Oden, who did not log a regular-season minute for the 49ers due to injury.

This round of losses follows the 2024 off-season, during which Charlotte lost four of its five starters to the transfer portal. Four of the five starters went on to play at a Power-Five conference team, two of whom were major contributors to their teams' earning an NCAA Tournament bid.

The returners

Freshman forwards Ben Bradford and Nick Richart, along with redshirt junior forward Aleks Szymczyk, are Charlotte's only returners heading into the 2025-2026 season.

Bradford was the only player of the trio to average over eight minutes per game at 8.5.

The additions

As of April 6, Charlotte's only additions are high school recruits, Jaylen Cross and Jarne Elouna Eyenga.

Cross, a Greensboro, N.C. native, was Charlotte's highest-rated recruit since 2009 and

is North Carolina's No. 8-ranked overall player.

In his senior campaign at Caldwell Academy, Cross averaged 15.9 points, three assists and 5.7 rebounds per game. The 6'4 guard chose Charlotte over schools like South Carolina and Louisiana State University.

Cross's counterpart, Elouna Eyenga, hails from San Juan Capistrano, Calif. and has international experience as an under-18 Belgian national team member. In three years of international play for Belgium, Elouna Eyenga averaged 6.1 points and 4.3 rebounds per game.

Despite the transfer portal's opening on March 25, Charlotte has yet to add a player from the portal. This leaves the duo of incoming freshmen with a mountain of opportunity, as two of the five players are currently projected to be rostered in the upcoming season.

Nationwide

Charlotte is not isolated in the yearly setbacks caused by the transfer portal.

Across the college sports landscape, other mid-major schools have struggled to recruit and retain talent as the transfer portal, and Name, Image and Likeness player benefits (NIL) give more power to players than ever, allowing players to move schools as they choose and larger schools to easily outbid universities like Charlotte when adding talent.

This disparity between Power-Five schools (teams within the ACC, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12 and SEC conferences) and Mid-Majors (schools not within those conferences) was displayed in the 2025 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament.

In the tournament's round of 16, there were no teams seeded No. 11 or higher, the first time since 2007, meaning beloved 'Cinderella story' teams were entirely absent from the tournament.

Paired with a lack of underdogs was a complete omission of Mid-Major teams, as only the SEC, Big Ten, Big 12 and ACC were represented. This was the first time since 1975 that the tournament had only four conferences in the round of 16.

The tournament's semi-finals continued a run of unprecedented predictability, where all four No. 1 seeds made the tournament's 'Final Four' for the second time ever. It was reported by NILWire.com that all four No. 1 seeds spent over \$8.4 million on their basketball programs, with fellow North Carolina institution Duke University leading the pack at \$21.4 million.

While not confirmed, it was reported by CollegeFactual.com that UNC Charlotte spent \$3,595,247 in 2025 on their men's basketball program, dwarfing that of March Madness' top seeds.

With the need for extra NIL spending more apparent than ever, Charlotte donors may have to open their checkbooks to build a competitor.



Dan Rice/Niner Times File

Charlotte students voice concerns over safety amid police efforts to improve campus security

Madison Washington | Staff Writer

UNC Charlotte is home to over 30,000 students, faculty and staff. Due to the University's large size and diversity, the Police & Public Safety regularly collaborate with the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department and other regional law enforcement agencies. However, despite these efforts, students remain concerned about campus safety.

The Niner Times conducted a survey with 19 female-identifying student responses, asking each to rate how safe they feel on campus on a scale of one to five, with five being the safest and one being the most unsafe. The average response from the group was a score of three.

"One of the first times I went to an event on campus, I left late, around 8 p.m. As I was getting in my car, a car full of men drove by me and started shouting at me, making me feel uncomfortable, especially since I was alone," said an anonymous first-year student through the survey.

These experiences illustrate the unease among women on campus, with some feeling compelled to limit their campus involvement due to safety concerns.

"Because I worry for my safety, I've actually put off going to events on campus, especially the ones that are late. I want to meet people and make friends without worrying about my safety," said an anonymous third-year student.

While concerns about safety persist, others are questioning the effectiveness of the current safety resources and the level of communication between students and campus police.

"I'm running through the safety resources we have on campus, and it is kind of just a basic thing they give at orientation. I think they could be better about having specific real transparency and communication between students and police would be beneficial," said an anonymous individual.

However, when it comes to actual campus security personnel, some feel that the police presence does not inspire confidence.

"The campus police presence isn't reassuring either; they don't take real safety seriously, aren't prompt in their arrival, often ask derogatory questions, and act as if they'd rather be anywhere else in the moment," said an anonymous graduate student. "Not only does it fail to prevent crime and harassment, it shifts the blame back onto the victim."

Other students believe it would be helpful to start other forms of training within their department, particularly focused on harassment.

"True assault and harassment prevention must start with training police to respond in these situations better and holding assailants accountable

and focusing prevention on how men can stop these crimes, not women," said an anonymous student.

Still, the UNC Charlotte Police Department has been improving communication and engagement with the campus community.

Jerry Lecomte, a sergeant with the UNC Charlotte Police Department's community policing division, has been with the department for 18 years and has been involved in community policing for over a decade. He emphasizes the importance of engagement, outreach and building trust.

The department conducts various outreach activities, including tabling on topics like stalking awareness, dangerous relationships and sexual assault. Lecomte details the efforts of the police department in providing a safe environment for the UNC Charlotte community.

However, with a population of over 30,000 students, the campus police department faces obstacles in ensuring its resources and education efforts are accessible to everyone.

"With such a large campus, sometimes, even if we're going to set up a resource table, it may be limited. You know, we try to be strategic where we place tables and get the most students through during that time frame," said Lecomte. "I may walk up to somebody and say, 'Can I tell you what we're up to here?' They say, 'I'm good, I gotta go to class.' From the standpoint of trying to provide that education and having access to all 30,000 students, it's tough. It's a challenge."

Despite the challenges of reaching such a large student body, Lecomte highlighted various initiatives the campus police hosts to educate and raise student awareness.

"We have alcohol awareness month, no texting and driving month, crime victims rights weekend, sexual assault awareness month and more," said Lecomte.

In addition to these awareness efforts, the division also provides resources and information directly to students through various campus events.

"We can be requested [by the University] to go out to the residence halls to set out resource tables. We have one coming up for admitted students day, where we'll provide resources on the department [Police & Public Safety] to new students. Pretty much anything that anybody would ask us to present on, from a safety standpoint or that is police related, we act as a resource," said Lecomte.

In addition to providing direct resources, the UNC Charlotte Police Department actively involves students in maintaining campus safety

through programs that promote community engagement.

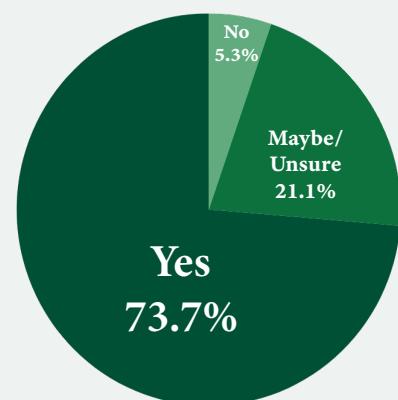
One such program is the Student Ranger program, which was introduced two years ago to empower students to take an active role in campus safety.

"I've got a Student Ranger program we incorporated about fall two years ago. They do building walkthroughs and parking deck checks. They'll have a radio on. They're all students, and they do a great job with it," said Lecomte.

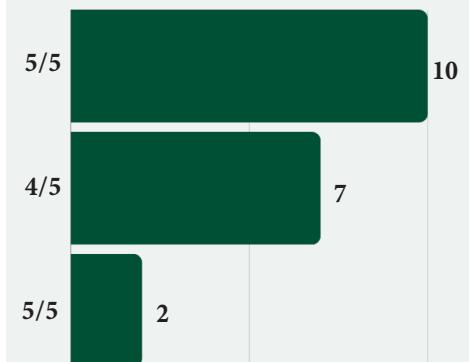
While the Student Ranger program helps bridge the gap between students and campus safety, Lecomte recognizes that there are still barriers to open communication, particularly when police officers are involved. Breaking down those barriers and creating a more approachable environment is key to fostering trust and providing support for the campus community.

Survey responses
(Out of 19 female-identifying students)

Have you or someone else you know ever felt unsafe on UNC Charlotte's campus?



On a scale of 1 to 5, how safe do you feel on campus overall?



"The campus police presence isn't reassuring either, they don't take real safety seriously, aren't prompt in their arrival, often ask derogatory questions and act as if they'd rather be anywhere else in the moment."

- Anonymous graduate student

"Because I worry for my safety, I've actually put off going to events on campus, especially the ones that are late. I want to meet people and make friends without worrying about my safety."

- Anonymous third-year student



Building an empire: Sharon L. Gaber is improving the UNC Charlotte name one step at a time

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor

“

“I put my own pressure on myself to be able to do things. I have grown kids that keep in contact. I still am, [just a] mom, but I also look at the 31,000 students here like they’re all my kids,” said Gaber. “I want to do the best we can for every single student and recognize that every student has a different set of needs, challenges and opportunities.”

- Chancellor Sharon L. Gaber

What does it take to raise a university's standing in five years drastically? For UNC Charlotte, the answer is Sharon L. Gaber.

UNC Charlotte's 76-spot climb in public universities' national ranking, record-breaking enrollment in the fall of 2024 with 31,091 students, reaching R1 status and implementation of an Artificial Intelligence Institute have all turned UNC Charlotte into an academic powerhouse, and all under Gaber's leadership.

“It’s a great honor and responsibility. It’s not something I ever planned on doing, and yet, it’s something that I’ve been fortunate enough to get to this position,” said Gaber. “I know I’ve tried hard to do a good job so that there will be future female chancellors.”

While an accomplished administrator in 2025, Gaber did not always have her eyes set on entering the world of higher education leadership. Gaber initially gravitated toward city planning and economic development.

The West Coast native has earned an A.B. in Economics and Urban Studies from Occidental College, an

Courtesy of UNC Charlotte

M.P.L. from the University of Southern California and a Ph.D. in City and Regional Planning from Cornell University.

After years of studying, Gaber secured a job in California, working in Long Beach. Her role in the Economic Development Department sparked her passion for improving the lives of others and inspired her to pursue a career in higher education.

"City planning is about solving issues—transportation, infrastructure, equity—and I realized that what really excited me was thinking about how to make cities better, how to make people's lives better," said Gaber.

Before Gaber went to work towards a Ph.D., she talked to her planning director, who was unsupportive.

"He was like, 'That's [graduate school] a waste.' And all I said was, 'Oh, okay, thank you. I don't think it's been a waste,'" said Gaber.

Despite the doubts from her previous director, Gaber remained confident and found inspiration from her sole female professor at the University of South Carolina, Jennifer Wolch, who was highly influential in her choice to pursue a higher education leadership role.

"I had one female professor in that entire time [and I thought] that was interesting," said Gaber. "She [Wolch] was really good at planning, so she was a role model. She went on to become a dean at UC Berkeley. So I kind of followed her footsteps, but I had a different set of opportunities."

Gaber debuted as a female higher education leader as the assistant department chair and graduate officer at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Over the course of 12 years, she moved up to become the department chair of community and regional planning and associate to the vice chancellor for research. In 2002, she began working for Auburn University as an urban planning professor, leading to her becoming the interim provost and vice president for academic affairs in 2008.

After moving around from university to university, Gaber landed in Toledo, Ohio, as the University of Toledo's president in 2015. In 2020, Gaber's plans began to look different as COVID-19 reshaped the higher education landscape, and Gaber was drawn to Charlotte.

When Gaber received the call urging her to apply as Charlotte's chancellor, she was not looking for a new job or to move to a different state. At Toledo, Gaber brought a diversity plan to promote inclusivity on campus, an enrollment plan to help with the University's graduate rate and retention and a master plan to reduce the University's footprint in the area.

While doing well in Toledo and making improvements, Gaber realized the possibilities with Charlotte, so she became in favor of taking the offer to apply.

Gaber saw Charlotte as an incredible opportunity to connect with the city and engage with students and the wider community, something

that she has always had a passion for improving city life.

"I saw Charlotte as a city with so much potential," said Gaber. "What I wanted is to be a part of a University that is helping to inspire, engage and activate the city because I think that it aligns with my interest [in urban planning], but it's also what a university should be doing."

Given the atmosphere at the time, with the COVID-19 lockdown and navigating the "virtual world," Gaber said the selection process was different and stressful, involving multiple interviews and committee reviews.

After a rigorous process, Gaber made it past three other finalists and through the peak of COVID-19 before being finally announced as chancellor in March 2020.

Gaber's earlier days as chancellor were marked by a unique set of challenges as the world adjusted to the new realities of the pandemic. With the campus quiet and empty during the spring of 2020, Gaber spent much of her early days on Zoom and exploring the campus, learning about the city and University as she went along.

"I sat in [my] office every day, and I'd look out, and nobody was here," said Gaber. "I mean, the first thing you do when you come to a new place is to meet people, right? Nobody [could] sit down and have a meeting, so I was 'Zooming' everyone. It was out of order because first, I learned my way around campus and the city, and then I met everyone else."

During those early days cooped up in her office, Gaber began working on UNC Charlotte's 10-year strategic plan, "Shaping What's Next."

The strategic plan, created to assist with student success set for 2021 - 2031, outlines four goals: A: Transform students' lives through education opportunity and excellence, B: Power the future through inquiry, research and creative discovery, C: Drive progress for North Carolina and beyond and D: Live our guiding commitments by leading in equity and engagement.

Written out under section A was to go from No. 113 to No. 87 in the U.S. News & World Public Universities National Ranking. In the fall of 2024, the University announced that it had already surpassed that goal and reached No. 81 ahead of the predicted time by seven years.

While becoming a Research 1 (R1) level institution was a long-term goal that was expected to fall under section B, the milestone was reached six years earlier than the initial 10-year plan set by the University and Gaber.

Years before Charlotte's R1 status, UNC Charlotte would have used research from other North Carolina universities rather than its own.

With hopes of changing that reality, as using other research was hold-

ing Charlotte's student research back, Gaber was at the forefront of change to bring Charlotte the prestigious Carnegie Classification of R1.

In addition to leading the change to R1, Gaber has focused on expanding the University's physical presence through the recently approved "Campus Master Plan."

Within the Campus Master Plan, the University aims to designate specific areas to bring a more traditional campus to life for Charlotte. Although not previously included in the master plan, the University purchased The Edge apartments, expanding the campus borders. Gaber hopes the initiative outlined in the plans will improve student life with more housing.

Changes to buildings such as the Cone Center might be made to improve their functionality as part of the Campus Master Plan. Gaber said that in the meeting with other campus administration members, she was the one to remind everyone that the University would still need to have University founder and first chancellor Bonnie Cone's name honored.

"I was the one who mentioned that we still have to have a building named for Miss Bonnie. To me, that seems like a no-brainer," said Gaber.

As the University grows, Gaber remains committed to accessibility, ensuring that she puts the students above all despite how busy she may be.

"For me, it's making sure that I'm accessible, that I'm listening, that I lead with empathy. I think understanding being human is the most important thing, as well as connecting with people," said Gaber. "I put my own pressure on myself to be able to do things. I have grown kids that keep in contact. I still am, [just a] mom, but I also look at the 31,000 students here like they're all my kids," said Gaber. "I want to do the best we can for every single student and recognize that every student has a different set of needs, challenges and opportunities."

Once a month, Gaber hosts a lunch in the Popp-Martin Student Union. Around 25 students join her for lunch to talk about the semester. Whether it be about class or something that has recently annoyed them, Gaber listens to it all.

Gaber uses that time with students to focus primarily on determining

what is working versus what is not at the University.

"I love doing [the lunches] and hearing from them; there are some little tactical things that I'll get along the way, too," said Gaber. "For me to connect with students, it's the best part of the job."

While making strides for the University and student, faculty and staff-specific needs, Gaber has also broken barriers on the administration level. Gaber highlighted the gravity of holding a position that had long been out of reach for many women before her.

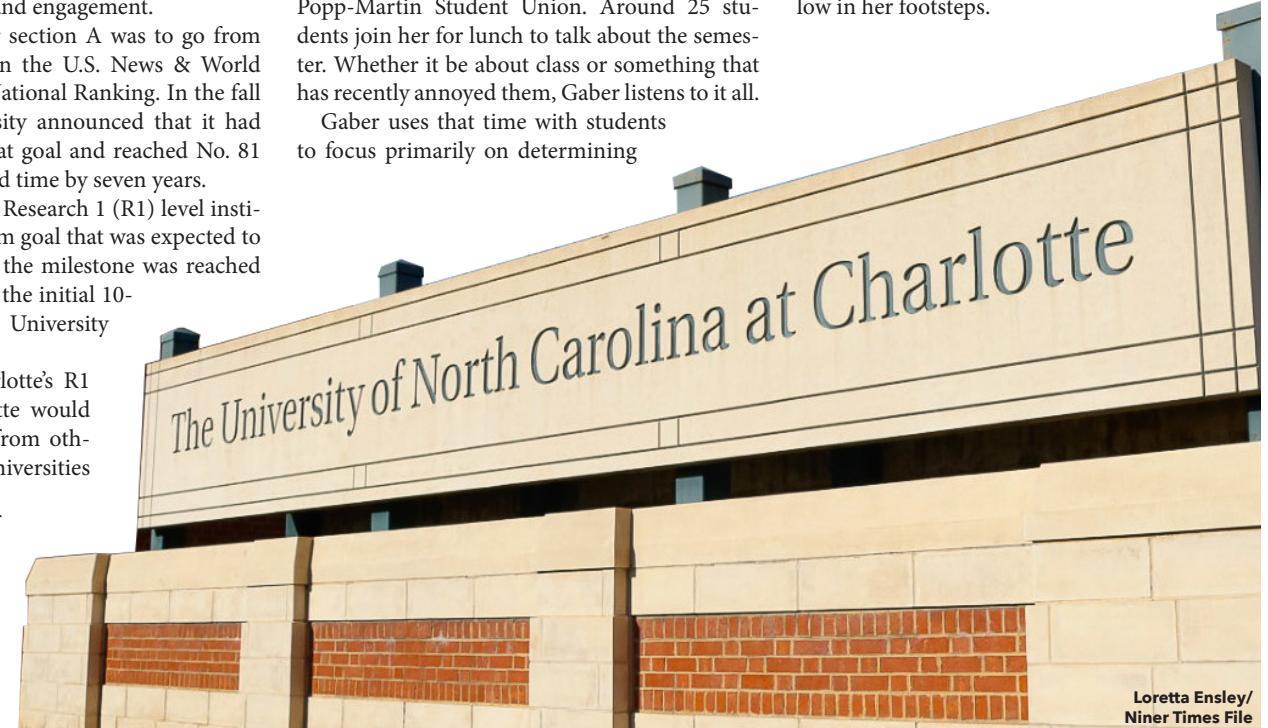
"When I first became chancellor, my daughters were like, 'What do you mean they haven't had a woman before?' and I think when you're younger, you think it makes sense that a woman or a man [can be in that role], but I think looking at history, it hasn't always been that way," said Gaber.

Stepping into the role with primarily male predecessors, Gaber recognized the challenges women in leadership face.

In addition to Wolch's early influence, Gaber also holds a deep admiration for Cone, whose legacy continues to guide Gaber in her leadership. Gaber honors Cone's impact by keeping a photograph of her in her office, a constant reminder of the foundation Cone built for the University.

As Gaber continues to guide UNC Charlotte into a future of growth and innovation, she remains committed to honoring the legacy of those who paved the way for her and others. With a deep respect for the past and an unwavering vision for the future, Gaber is not only shaping the trajectory of the University but also leaving an undeniable mark on the broader community.

For her, leadership is not just about achieving milestones but ensuring that the opportunities she has worked hard for will empower future generations of students and leaders to follow in her footsteps.



Charlotte joins nationwide movement as march draws thousands against Trump

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor

Thousands of Charlotte community members came together to protest against President Donald Trump and his administration. The “Hands Off!” Charlotte march on April 5 marked the largest demonstration that Charlotte has seen since the Black Lives Matter Movement in 2020.

The march was one of hundreds nationwide, organized by Hands Off! and Indivisible, bringing millions of people together to protest against the dismantling of America by Trump, Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

“This is a nationwide mobilization to stop the most brazen power grab in modern history,” reads Hands Off! on their website. “They want to strip America for parts—shuttering Social Security offices, firing essential workers, eliminating consumer protections, and gutting Medicaid—all to bankroll their billionaire tax scam. They’re handing over our tax dollars, our public services, and our democracy to the ultra-rich. If we don’t fight now, there won’t be anything left to save.”

The two-mile-long march in Charlotte began at 11 a.m. at the Mecklenburg Department of Social Services. Marches passed by medical of-

fices, a local park, an elementary school and the Mint Museum, circling back to the Department of Social Services at 1 p.m. These were all places where staff, clients, patients, teachers and students had experienced budget cuts or threats of cuts from the current administration.

“We chose this location for its relevance and accessibility and to support this important neighborhood’s civic institutions as we tell Trump, Musk and those in power to keep their HANDS OFF!” read the details of the march online.

Amid growing concerns over the future of vital social programs, one local community member reflected on the recent protest’s scale and diversity, highlighting the crowd’s unity and collective purpose.

“I think that is probably the biggest community protest that I’ve been to,” said a Charlotte community member. “This one has a huge percentage of multiple different people, and we’re all coming together to support our community and get our hands off of Social Security and Medicaid and all the

things we put our money into.”

Individuals were seen holding signs that read, ‘History has its eyes on us,’ ‘We the people are one human race,’ ‘Save democracy now,’ ‘Stop the insanity,’ ‘Hate can’t make us great,’ ‘Ikea has a better cabinet’ and ‘Equality hurts no one.’

Jackie Goldberger, a Charlotte Indivisible member and organizer of the Hands Off! Charlotte march called out the city and how it is the community’s time to take a stand.

“I’m a grandmother, and I’ve been fighting for these things my whole life. This is not the country or the planet I intend to leave for my grandchildren and the kids,” said Goldberger. “Everyone in the country has to show up. And Charlotte is certainly no exception.”

“Our team here at Indivisible CLT has built a fantastic program with a focus on the impacts of federal budget freezes, DOGE interference and

the overall dysfunction the current administration has had on the lives of Charlotte area residents,” reads the program’s mission statement.

As the protestors gathered around the lawn, they were greeted by the organizers from Indivisible Charlotte, who invited speakers from community activists to UNC Charlotte professors.

One of the most prominent speeches from the gathering was from Charlotte’s associate professor of social work, Dr. Annelise Mennicke, who recently lost her research grant worth \$450,000.

The primary focus of Mennicke’s research was on the healing trajectory of LGBTQ+ survivors of sexual violence. The grant was terminated because it no longer had effectuating agency priorities.

“This grant will also have impacts for the students at UNC Charlotte. We know that students who are exposed to research become researchers and innovate the most advanced technologies in the world,” said Mennicke. “The cancelation of



that grant has disrupted this pipeline, and our team included many students with marginalized identities and conveyed a strong message to our students that they don't matter. The research doesn't matter. Their identities don't matter. The government has betrayed them. Now, they live in fear. Will they be able to find jobs? Should they speak out? How are they going to pay their bills?"

Amid the current hardships she is facing, Mennicke continues to remain determined and encourages others to speak out.

"We cannot accept that as a normal outcome. We cannot let these grant terminations be the first step in that slippery slope of an ugly and violent arc of history," said Mennicke. "I'm here to tell you today that we cannot let Elon Musk, DOGE and Donald Trump set the scientific research agenda for our country."

Individuals ranging in age from ages five to 70 were in attendance, advocating for change and standing up for their families, friends and community members.

Charlotte local John Jewell attended the march with his two daughters. He spoke about how it is important to bring his young children to events such as these to expose them to real-life scenarios and historic moments within their community.

"We try and teach them to be citizens of the world, and part of that is doing things that are sometimes uncomfortable, like coming out on a hot day and helping others and showing kindness, and we can extend that beyond just our friends to other people in the community and the country and the world."

Jewell also acknowledged his privilege, along with others in the pri-

marily white crowd, and how he and his family could attend marches without fearing consequences.

"It is mostly white people, which is, I think, reflective of at least this part of Charlotte in general, but I think Charlotte can do better. I am a privileged, white, educated person, so I have the flexibility to not have to work today," said Jewell.

Kathy, another marcher, is a retired Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools system teacher of 30 years and a member of Indivisible. She spoke on the importance of fighting for democracy.

"It's very important that we are here because it's going to take all of us; it's going to take the whole village to make this go away," said Kathy. "People coming out, getting active, writing post-cards, going to protests, sending money to candidates and causes that are fighting the terms like the Democracy Docket and some of those others that are in court, fighting all this."

In continuation of the surge of Gen-Z involvement in politics, several students from UNC Charlotte attended the march.

One fourth-year Charlotte student emphasized the far-reaching impact of laws on every aspect of society, urging that change will only come through collective effort and determination.

"Everyone I know is affected by these laws,

myself included; queer laws, civil rights laws, women's rights laws, our public education, our economy, our national parks, our climate, everyone on this planet is affected by these laws," said the fourth-year student while remaining anonymous. "You have to show what you want. We have to make change ourselves. It's not gonna just happen."

One graduate student from Charlotte, Teresa Wilkinson, spoke on the stress she has for budget cuts to her public health program and how it will affect future generations.

"I'm specializing in sexual health, primarily in public schools, and a lot of research goes toward promoting health in schools like that. And the more cuts that they're making, the less and less we'll be able to promote health and well-being for our children, which are the future of America," said Wilkinson.

Wilkinson also highlighted the positive atmosphere of the march and how it touched on multiple topics, such as education, healthcare, taxes and immigration, giving everyone a voice.

"I love how this

is just so many different people coming together," said Wilkinson. "So many different aspects of our lives are being attacked, and marginalized groups of people are just not being taken care of."

Hands Off! protests saw record turnout across all 50 states. In Charlotte, community members are urging others to take action and join forces to protect those who can not defend themselves.

"If you're sitting on the fence and you're at all concerned about what's happening in our country, come out to a protest, come out to an organization," said Charlotte community member Jordan Fassa. "Support your community, organizations that support rights and groups that you support, whether that's feeding the homeless, whether that's protecting LGBTQ+ rights; it has never been more important to go and participate in society in a way that helps people who are impacted and marginalized by Trump's policies and by their federal government's attacks on the average person."



Sunnya Hadavi &
Megan Bentley/
Niner Times

How generative future for art and

Wes Packham | Asst. Arts & Culture Editor

OpenAI released its GPT-4o model on March 25, and six days later, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman posted on X, saying that ChatGPT added one million users in a single hour, a number not seen since its original boom in 2022.

While it is not the first of its kind, GPT-4o is one of the most advanced image-generation software today. It quickly gained traction on X, with many users sharing their creations made with the new model.

One popular trend on the rise involved generating images in the iconic Studio Ghibli style, the signature style of animation artist and director Hayao Miyazaki. Notably, The White House posted an AI image recreation of deported individual Virginia Basora-Gonzalez, igniting debate over the appropriate and respectful use of AI.

But AI is also reaching beyond internet microcosms. Christie's, a highly acclaimed British auction house, listed an auction for AI-generated artworks totaling \$728,784, and in retaliation, over 5,600 artists protested the sale, signing a letter demanding its cancellation.

At UNC Charlotte, many AI-related conversations center on essay generation, study aids or note-taking, but these instances show how AI is creeping into creative fields.

Writing, design, visual arts and music creation are all at risk, career paths many students at UNC Charlotte are working towards.

Third-year graphic design student George Stern found his interest in graphic design at a young age through connections with his family.

"I've kind of been doing it my entire life; I've always done art. The way that I bonded with my dad was just sitting on the couch and just shitting on commercials. My uncle's in graphic design, and I've always had an eye for it, a passion for it," said Stern.

Students expressed that it does not seem right for computers to be making art, an almost innately human activity, while humans are stocking shelves, arguing that it makes more sense for the roles to be reversed.

"In high school, I was doing web design, and I took one multimedia class and was a lot more interested in that. I also have an interest in marketing and the more creative side of that," said Kaitlyn Hazuka.

Students may have conflicting feelings revolving around the use of AI. Many share that their classmates have been using AI as part of their creative workflow, and while that may im-

prove speed, there are questions about whether the work is someone's own.

The rise of AI presents a new and pressing concern for soon-to-be and recent graduates, a factor that did not exist just a few years ago but has rapidly become central to the field.

While students are more wary about the integrity risks of using AI in their assignments, Charlotte professor, Nathaniel Underwood, is experimenting with incorporating AI into his workflow.

Originally a painter before transitioning to commercial illustration around 15 years ago, Underwood was in the industry long before the development of AI. Today, however, he is incorporating image-generation software such as Midjourney into his creative process.

Midjourney is one of the most popular image-generation AI models, oriented more toward stylized and artistic styles rather than photorealism.

"Midjourney might be able to create this really cool composition or something I maybe wasn't exactly thinking about, but I recognize that has potential, then using my skill set [I'm] adapting, modifying and customizing that," said Underwood.

Underwood has been experimenting with rendering 85% of a project by hand, a landscape, for example, and having AI complete the last 15%. While this can be efficient, Underwood prompts him to question how much creative freedom he is sacrificing.

"What amount of agency are you letting go of?" said Underwood. "If it's finishing it, and it's making it look terrific, and everybody's happy, and it's copyrightable, and it's all good, and it saves like 10-15 hours, is that okay?"

Though Underwood can copyright his final pieces, there is still the risk that generative models rely on unauthorized copyrighted material during training.

For AI models to function, they must base their responses on millions of pieces of data fed into them. For large language models, it means books, websites and research papers. For image generation models, it means photographs, artworks and sketches.

This data is not unethical in feeding an AI model in and of itself. The issue arises when the data is copyrighted material.

Currently, the use of copyrighted material to train AI models may fall under the fair use clause of the Copyright Act of 1976; its legal status does not determine its ethicality.

"Criticism, comment, news reporting,



AI is shaping the design students

teaching, scholarship or research is not an infringement of copyright," reads Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976.

It can be argued that AI training falls under teaching or research, but the exact verdict is subject to change.

The novelty and uniqueness of AI make it complicated to determine what exactly is legal in the realm of AI development.

While students and professors alike work more on the individual level of AI, UNC Charlotte is making larger strides toward becoming a hub for AI research, as apparent in the creation of the AI Institute in February 2025 after years of preparation.

The institute is oriented towards research in STEM fields. While not directly impacting creative fields, any additional funding into AI will affect every subdivision of the technology.

Co-director of the AI institute, Stephanie Schuckers, sees issues involved with her work.

"I do see it as just another period of transition. AI definitely will touch everyone's lives just like computing and mobile devices, and there will be legitimate concerns that will have to be addressed," said Schuckers.

Despite acknowledging these risks, Schuckers has witnessed AI's benefits firsthand, notably in healthcare.

"AI [is] helping us to do better and more meaningful work right now. [It can] help us to be healthier and [help with] problems that we can solve in terms of understanding. I can't help but be positive," said Schuckers. "I think as a student, what you need to be thinking about is what your value adds in a world with AI."

As benefits cannot be ignored, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to restrictions. AI is excellent at saving money and time for businesses, and Stern believes that our current government is less likely to impose restrictions due to its pro-business approach.

"I don't think it [laws and regulations] is reasonable to happen. With the current government, it's very pro-business and making the system work for businesses," said Stern.

With AI affecting nearly every career field in one way or another, Stern believes that education and understanding of AI are paramount to student success.

"UNC Charlotte students, I think, are at a distinct disadvantage because they're not being taught it. We're not being prepared as well as we could be," said Stern. "But I think this is an issue not just in Charlotte but with every campus. The current generation of graphic designers is not

being prepared much."

They say 'ignorance is bliss' but when it comes to technology as volatile and impactful as AI, it is not ignorance but understanding that may be the best path forward. Despite this, conversations about AI are often shied away from and commonly seen as taboo.

"I mean, I think it's kind of like a hush-hush thing. You don't want people to know you're using it," said Stern.

With direct experience using AI in his professional work, Underwood understands that it can be a tool for his work. He often asks his students their opinions, helping to keep the conversation flowing and combatting the taboos of the subject.

"Most students reject AI now, but the ones who understand it will dictate the future," said Underwood.

Many students support restrictions regarding AI to ensure its safe and responsible development, comparing it to other protections that have come about in the internet era.

"Technology will rush ahead, and protections will follow. It may take a while, but I do believe there should be guardrails around AI, just as there are with data and privacy laws," said Hazuka.

While legislation can help create additional protections for artists, it may be more difficult due to the Trump administration's executive order "Removing Barriers to American Leadership in Artificial Intelligence" from Jan. 23, requiring an action plan from certain government officials within 180 days.

Restrictions are not the only way artists can be supported. Businesses and individuals can choose to prioritize and invest in human-made work, preferring originality, expression and intention over automation.

But even with ethical consumption and advocacy, it remains true that AI is not going away. Whether it is in a design studio, a classroom or a healthcare lab, its influence is quickly growing.

Only time will tell what the future of AI and art will look like. But as the technology evolves, so must the conversation around it. For students stepping into creative industries, it may not be enough to resist AI; it will be essential to understand it.

"The rate at which it's changing is just insane. I don't think we can even predict five years into the future what it will look like," said Hazuka.

Rather than fearing what is to come, the next generation of artists and designers might instead define it.



Camila Surinach/
Niner Times

SASA is making a name for itself, one educational event at a time

Lily Kate Witcher | Staff Writer

Though only in its third year as an organization, the South Asian Student Association (SASA) has already grown to become a valuable meeting space for the South Asian community at UNC Charlotte.

SASA's mission is to share and uplift the cultures and traditions of the eight South Asian countries of Nepal, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. The organization hosts cultural events and festivities, helps to shed light on South Asian experiences and provides opportunities for students to make friends and get involved through leadership.

"It's more than just helping South Asians; it's also getting people to know each other," said SASA president and fourth-year student Rushil Jadia. "I know how hard it is for students to actually go out of their way and talk to new people and make friends. I've seen a lot of people make good friends from this organization."

Jadia has been with SASA since its inception, and he has seen the organization grow to include over 200 registered members.

"I'd say [SASA] has evolved in a way that we are able to create more inclusive events rather than just having more events catered towards one group," said Jadia. "We were really able to get our board together more and just understand the real purpose of this organization."

SASA has an expansive executive board that

includes the marketing, media, events, culinary and treasurer teams. Second-year student Parth Vyas is a member of the Culture Team, a committee that ensures that all South Asian countries are well-represented in SASA's events.

When organizing popular events such as the annual mock Shaadi wedding celebrations, the Culture Team focuses on showcasing the unique traditions of each region and culture. They also make a point of keeping up to date on issues of activism within the South Asian community.

"It's been really cool to make many different friends and also see things from my own culture that I never even knew about," said Vyas. "I'm really glad that there is a very dense South Asian population at Charlotte because it's nice to see familiar faces of people that I know, to meet new people and keep learning new cultural things."

On March 14, SASA held their annual Holi Hungama celebration to honor the Hindu festival of colors, love and spring. Students came to the event to throw colorful powders and water to celebrate the arrival of spring and the triumph of good over evil. SASA held the event in collaboration with the Tamil Student Organization, the Desi Dhamaka Student Organization and Telugu Student Association.

SASA's ability to represent a great diversity of cultures across South Asia means that it is able to work frequently with other organizations to

showcase its shared traditions. On March 25, SASA hosted the Roots On the Runway fashion show along with the Southeast Asian Student Association, Hmong Student Association, Vietnamese Student Association and Asian Student Association, where students walked the runway in their best cultural outfits.

While SASA continues to provide opportunities to learn about South Asian culture, Jadia has noticed that many people still are not well-educated on South Asian experiences. To help shed light on these experiences, SASA hosts its Chai and Chat events to provide a forum for discussing various issues affecting their community. Previous Chai and Chats have featured special guest speakers, including prominent South Asian authors, UNC Charlotte staff members and North Carolina State Senator Mujtaba Mohammed.

The most recent Chai and Chat, organized in collaboration with the United Minds Organization, focused on the theme "What is Brown?" Students were encouraged to enjoy chai and snacks while participating in a group discussion panel and conversation on culture, perceptions and stereotypes.

SASA plans to host a concert on April 18 from 8-10 p.m. in collaboration with Codachrome, UNC Charlotte's premier acapella group. The concert will feature Penn Masala, the world's first

South Asian acapella group. Their music combines popular English and Hindi songs, and their success has earned them invitations to perform at the White House twice.

SASA welcomes and encourages all students to come to their events, regardless of background.

"You don't have to be South Asian to come to our events and be a part of SASA," Vyas said. "The SASA board as a whole tries to make the organization and its events very open to everyone because we want people to experience our culture. We want people to learn about things, to have fun and engage in our activities."

As far as what is next for SASA, the future looks bright for the organization.

"I've been meeting so many creative people coming in from the new freshman class, and I also see people who are just finding out about SASA and think the collection of all these different people expressing interest in SASA will help make it grow," Vyas said. "I think that once we get new people on board and have some new ideas, SASA will continue to thrive and have a very big presence on campus."

SASA's executive board applications are open and available on their Instagram, @sasa_clt.

Courtesy of SASA



Jeff Gillman reflects on 10 years as director of the Botanical Gardens

Nick Caceres | Staff Writer

Serving as a professor at the Klein College of Science and the director of the Botanical Gardens at UNC Charlotte, Dr. Jeff Gillman has helped expand the gardens over the past decade, implementing new branches to a vibrant spot that countless students visit or pass through.

Gillman holds both a Ph.D in horticulture and a master's in entomology, which he acquired at the University of Georgia. However, Gillman's passion for plant life comes from his time growing up near Philadelphia in Longwood, Pa.

"I was brought up very close to Longwood Gardens, a botanical garden up in Pennsylvania," said Gillman. "That got me very interested in working with plants, and I decided that insects were my real thing."

During his time at the University of Georgia, Gillman would rub shoulders with another well-respected and prolific researcher and author in this field of study, Dr. Michael Dirr, who was teaching there at the time.

In between this period and his arrival at UNC Charlotte, Gillman published several successful books such as "The Truth About Garden Remedies: What Works, What Doesn't, and Why" (2008) and "Decoding Gardening Advice: The Science Behind the 100 Most Common Recommendations" (2011). This output would earn him a spot on the staff of the award-winning Fine Gardening Magazine as a contributing editor.

Perhaps one of the biggest exposures for Gillman and his work would be in a 2009 appearance on The Martha Stewart Show alongside his friend Joe Lamp'l, executive producer and host of "Growing a Greener World."

"What can I say? It was fun. They flew me to New York. I got to be on TV," said Gillman.

Gillman first became the director of the UNC Charlotte Botanical Gardens in 2015. Over the past decade, he has worked to improve the gardens and help grow its outreach to students and

members of the community.

"When I first came here, my predecessor, [Larry] Mellichamp, one of the greatest plantmen that I've ever met, had put together an amazing collection of plant materials," said Gillman. "I've never felt that my job here was to make a better garden. My job was always to make the garden more accessible and really get the plants to the people."

Gillman's perspective on the goals of the Botanical Gardens comes from his expertise of being a horticulturist, which differs from botany.

"Botanists are extremely interested in the science of plants. Horticulturists are very interested in producing plants for economic gain," said Gillman. "If you're looking at the best way to fertilize a plant, that's a horticulturist. If you're looking at what type of peach to grow or what type of apple to grow, that's a horticulturist."

Gillman has employed his horticultural education over this past decade at the Botanical Gardens. New sections, including flowers, trees and plant varieties from the Piedmont region and other parts of the temperate world, will be added, excluding the greenhouse.

One of the improvements that both he and his crew are proud of is the new surface trail located in the Van Landingham Glen. This trail allows more people to access and admire the understory of woodland gardens comprised of Appalachian natives and hybrid rhododendrons from a collaboration with the Rhododendron Society.

"It's not ADA compliant, but now people with wheelchairs and walkers can get through the Glen much more easily," said Gillman.

Not only did Gillman's crew install a sturdier path, but they also added new sections to the Van Landingham Glen. The Polly Rogers Memorial Sensory Garden was installed and opened in 2021, serving as a therapeutic spot for children and a shade garden. It consists of summersweet,

anise and ferns and was dedicated to the late Polly Rogers, who passed away in 2018 while studying at the Cato College of Education to become a special education teacher.

Gillman also had a hand in installing the Carolina Garden Trail, an outdoor living exhibit that showcases North Carolina's history through cultivation going as far back as what Native Americans used to grow.

"[The Carolina Garden Trail] traces the crops of the Carolinas over the years and [has been] been very popular, especially for history classes and communication studies classes," said Gillman.

Gillman continues to enhance the Botanical Gardens, building on the growth fostered by the previous director. While Mellichamp introduced many new species to the gardens, Gillman is now focused on deepening public engagement and appreciation.

Showing support for future projects can be done by bringing home plants from a plant sale hosted by the Botanical Gardens.

"Our plant sale is April 10, 11 and 12," said Gillman. "We get most of our funding not through the University but through things like plant sales and classes. So these plant sales are a big deal for us."

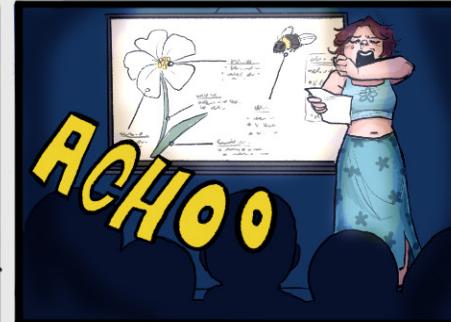
With the growing urbanization in Charlotte, Gillman stresses the importance of being educated in the natural world, not just for those majoring in the practice he teaches but in general.

"The garden used to be common knowledge," said Gillman. "Nowadays, when people go out into nature, they really don't know what they're looking at and how important it is. We need to be paying attention to what's out there, and we need to stop fighting nature by planting grass and a couple of Boxwoods and working with nature by planting things that actually want to be here."



Niner's Comics: Pollen Allergies

Blaise Uy | Staff Illustrator



Opinion: The music department deserves more appreciation

Rachel Johnson | Staff-Writer



Music and arts comprise a large portion of the daily activities college students engage in. Whether it is the music they blast on the way to class to tune out the people talking or the show they watch in the library during a prolonged study break, harmonious sounds produced by various artists engulf the lives of UNC Charlotte attendees. Despite this, the talent and creative production in the campus music department often remain overlooked.

The Charlotte music department is led by a diverse array of nationally recognized scholars and artists who are thoroughly skilled in categories about opera, jazz, musical theatre, orchestra, voice and more. Students can participate in various bands, ensembles and choirs regardless of their major or intended focus of study, allowing all Niners to showcase their talents and musical passion.

"The Music Department presents [over] 80 productions per academic year on campus and in the larger Charlotte community," said Dr. Joseph Skillen, the Department of Music chair. "These, in addition to our on-campus performances in Rowe Recital Hall and Belk Theatre in

Robinson Hall, also include our bands at athletic events, student ensembles performing in regional concerts and competitions, choirs singing in local concerts, run-out concerts to area schools and retirement communities and ensembles performing in Uptown venues. So, we do more than most people realize, and the diversity of our types of performances makes it difficult to advertise a 'season' of events with regularity."

Even though concerts and performances are constantly occurring in venues on and around the Charlotte campus, promotion of these events by the school falls flat. Despite the fact that 10 concerts and performances will occur on campus in April 2025 alone, information about these events tangibly and digitally can seem scarce for those not heavily involved in the music department itself.

"I think we need more posters around campus and people at tables [to] shout out about upcoming events and tell people what we're doing, what's coming up and [provide] fun fact pamphlets," said Ash Heraill, a second-year voice major at Charlotte. "Having our events and concerts announced as nicely as the sports events are in students' emails would [also] help."

Intentionally promoting the Charlotte music department aids students in accessing new levels of exposure and potential professional opportunities. Statistics from the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project show that 82% of dance and theatre majors have worked as professional artists, and 61% of music majors currently work as professional artists.

Even now, current Charlotte students participate in professional events with their respective choirs and bands at Charlotte Hornets games, Mecklenburg County Government ceremonies, the North Carolina Music Educators Association conference and more.

Making students aware that these opportunities are accessible to them regardless of their major can open doors of opportunity for the entire music department. As both spectators and participants, students can expand their artistic perspectives, express themselves and grow the level of engagement that the department receives.

"I think reaching out to see if there are more performance opportunities around campus would show that there is a very successful music department at Charlotte. Not to promote people to change their major, but to provide people who love mu-

sic to be able to branch out and express themselves," said Ashlee Krok, a second-year music education major.

While it may seem difficult to build similar levels of camaraderie and tradition around artistic and musical events on campus in comparison to sporting events, the power of social media and campus promotion should not be underestimated.

Whether it is a post about a concert on the main Charlotte Instagram account or a simple email highlighting upcoming arts events for the month, any degree of awareness could draw in a handful of fresh faces and willing supporters. Even hosting events in different campus sections besides Robinson Hall, the main Charlotte performing arts facility, could attract new audiences.

"A lot of students don't know that concerts are going on here, and some people don't even know what Robinson Hall is," said Roberto Gutierrez, a second-year voice and double bass major. "Having more concerts around campus and not just in Robinson could show others passing by what we do."

Involving the whole Charlotte community in the development of future artists can allow fresh perspectives to influence the creative direction of future projects and performances in the music department.

When artists only receive audiences composed of family members and friends, they are prevented from receiving the more impartial feedback that they may desire to aid in their professional development. Access to a vast array of insight from both familiar and unfamiliar faces can also assist the music department in knowing how to curate art that engages people of all backgrounds.

"I think those who know about us are very supportive. Our challenge is continually expanding our spheres of influence," said Skillen. "Perhaps more people could bring friends to concerts, but I also think it would be helpful for there to be a 'what's cool this week' subscription list for the campus that would include a number of the performing arts events that the College of Arts + Architecture sponsors throughout the year. Once more people recognize what's in their own backyard, they often seek more opportunities. I would also welcome the possibility of an Arts Representative student worker who may want to help us with our event marketing."

Music and arts are integral parts of the lives of Charlotte students. From audios heard while scrolling on TikTok before class to car radios humming throughout the streets of campus, the music swirls around our campus in a chaotically harmonious fashion. With the impact music has on the lives of students, it is necessary to recognize the creative, talented minds in the Charlotte music department who will be the future suppliers of these sounds.

Opinion: The scooter madness must stop

Emsley Jackson | Opinion Editor

Similar to how electric vehicles hum a siren song upon approach, the whir of a Lime scooter coming up behind you on a sidewalk causes hairs to stand on end. These fun and alternative ways to get around campus have given way to reckless navigation of the roads and sidewalks by individuals with little to no regard for the sanctity of human life. The streets of Gotham are full of Jokers, and Batman is nowhere to be found.

Lime scooters allow riders on this campus to go too fast and cut it way too close. Tight sidewalks and crowded roads are not the places to be fast and furious, especially with no helmets. Simply wearing a helmet can reduce the risk of head injury by almost 85%.

With the obvious dangers that accompany riding a scooter, Parking and Transportation Services (PATS) "strongly encourage[s] you to bring a helmet to wear while riding." More often than

not, those riding are not wearing appropriate gear, and pedestrians are definitely not outfitted for collision, making the risks of a crash all the more worrisome. One bump in the pavement could mean serious harm to anyone in the vicinity.

Other cities are taking note of the dangers associated with unregulated electric transport. The Austin Monitor reported that the City Mayor's Committee for People With Disabilities was concerned about how rented scooters are strewn about, blocking pathways and making navigation harder.

According to KUOW, Seattle's NPR news station, "Seattle's popular ride-share electric scooters are sending tens of thousands of people zipping across town—and some to Harborview with serious injuries. Last year, the city's trauma hospital saw 163 serious injuries from e-scooters or e-bikes, many of them head injuries." In 2023,

even the opinionated citizens of Paris voted in a referendum to banish the sneaky wheels from their already crowded streets.

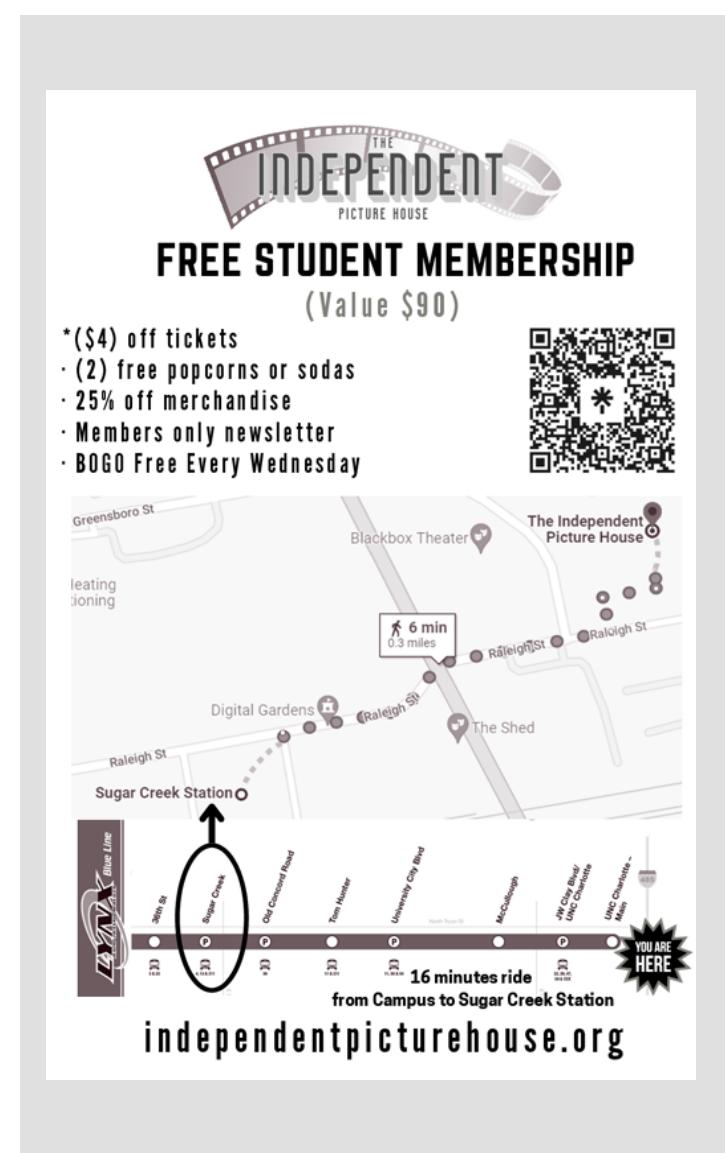
As we travel back to Charlotte and refocus on the scooters terrorizing us locally, some might ask, 'Is it really that deep?' All of this discourse over some scooters? Scooters are silly; they always have been. Autoped, as a self-propelled vehicle, used to be discounted as "a 'freak' vehicle" by cycling snobs. But until you have been nearly plowed down by an individual so close to you on a sidewalk that your arm hair exchanged business cards, it may never be that deep.

From cars and buses to scooters, skateboards and even motorized unicycles, the roads of University City are a chaotic mix of wheels. The argument could be made that people and things with wheels, in general, were never meant to commingle. Accidents are going to happen regardless of the precautions we put in place to

navigate sharing the streets.

But this does not mean that precautions should not be taken to prevent these accidents. Students need to be alert and aware when driving in the street with cars or on the sidewalk with people. The speed limit should be reduced on these scooters, or at the very least, helmets should be more accessible to students who may not have one on hand.

If you or a loved one have been victimized by a scooter, you may be entitled to financial compensation. You may also be familiar with having your life flashing before your eyes and asking, 'Why did I not just take the bus?' Hindsight is 20/20. Unless you are driving a scooter. In that case, hindsight, foresight and peripheral vision are optional. So until scooters slow down or regulations tighten up, we all need to walk around campus with our heads on a swivel.





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