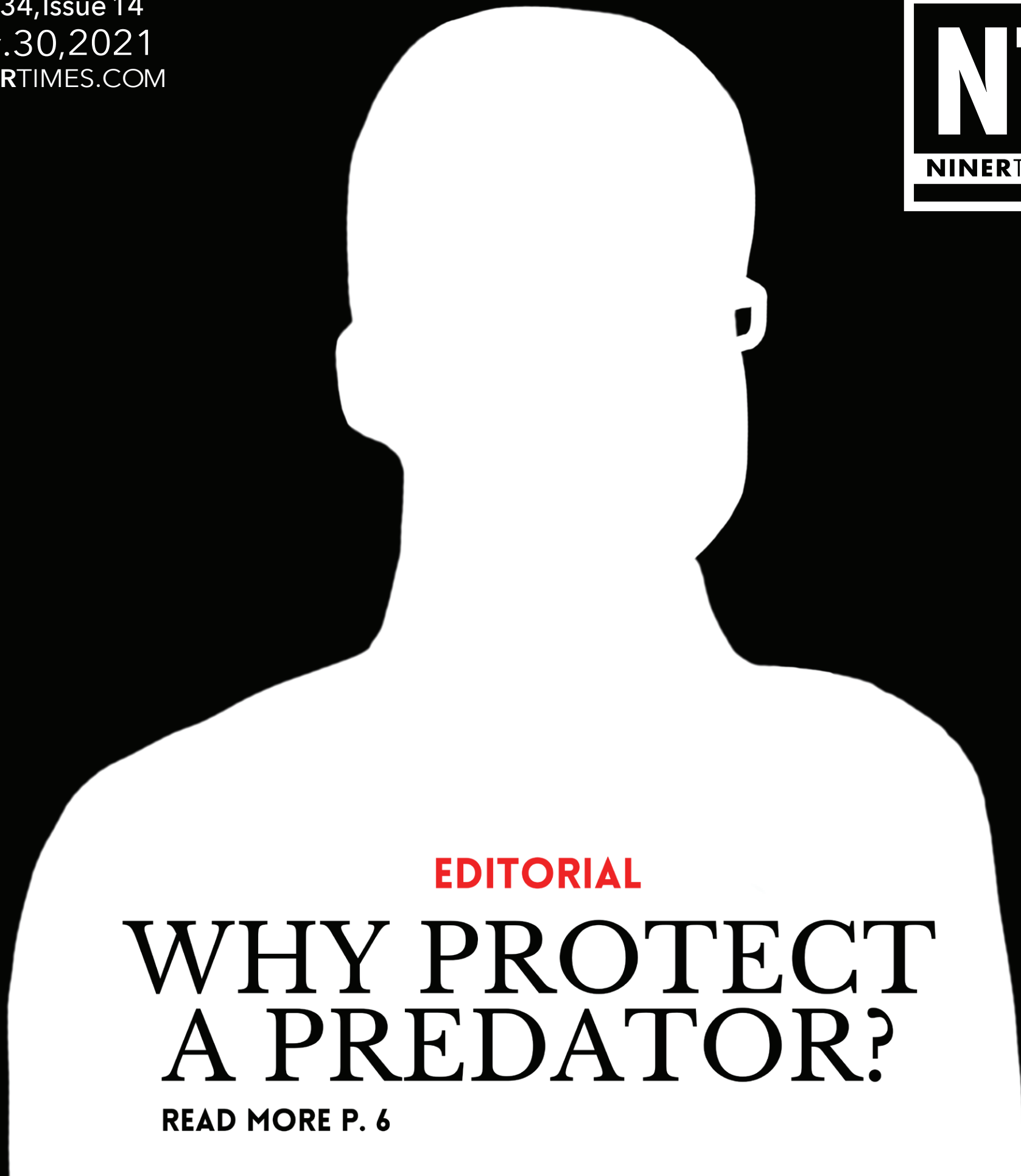


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EDITORIAL

WHY PROTECT A PREDATOR?

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Photo by Niyathi Sulkunte

COVID-19 REINFECTION RESEARCH STUDY

Interview with Dr. Alex Dornburg about his research as well as undergraduate and graduate students' involvement

by Jessica Ceballos
Asst. News Editor

Photo of Dornburg conducting reinfestation research
courtesy of Office of University Communications

Dr. Alex Dornburg, assistant professor in the department of bioinformatics and genomics, researches reinfection rates of Covid-19 using evolutionary biology. In his lab, Dornburg includes UNC Charlotte graduate and undergraduate students' participation and learning from doing this research.

"We are trying to take something terrible and turn it into as much of a positive as we can," said Dornburg.

On Oct. 1, a study was published in the Lancet Microb about Covid-19 reinfection rates. Covid-19 reinfection is the ability for an individual to get Covid-19 again within a certain period of having Covid-19 once before. In an interview with the Niner Times, Dornburg explained from the study that there is a time-period for a person who previously had Covid-19 to be reinfected, which fell anywhere from three months to three years. The average, however, was 16 to 17 months. Dornburg stressed that this range is different for everyone as individuals are unique in their health standings. For example, according to Dornburg, an older, immunocompromised person has a greater risk for quicker reinfection than a healthy, younger person.

The study concludes with steps toward another study about reinfection rates in vaccinated individuals.

Dornburg discussed evolutionary biology when describing the Covid-19 reinfection research and where that can be applied in other aspects of scientific research. "You get a sense of what that means for your genetics," said Dornburg. "If we retrace those steps, we can figure out what everything in common and how long it's had the change. We just

published a paper that uses this same idea in cancer. We are able to track primary tumors and metastases and then re-map the patient history back onto that to see how the cancer's actually responded to different therapies and how the different mutations arose. Taking that kind of thinking, we can actually use this to enhance personalized medicine and come up with predictable forecasts of when you apply this therapy you are likely to see this [result]."

According to a study published in the Lancet Microb, "Evolutionary immunological inference can be deployed on future emerging diseases, rapidly informing critical gaps in knowledge necessary for effective pandemic response."

In this research, many hands make this all possible to learn and grow in science. Dornburg told the Niner Times about the involvement of graduate and undergraduate students in the research on campus. While reinfection research affects the world because everyone wants to know what is happening, these students are allowed to learn and work with each other.

This research is conducted in Dornburg's lab group, where he and the students work collaboratively to train in "how to code, various analyses, a lot of evolutionary analyses, how to do biogenetics, biogenetic comparative methods and how to access public sequence databases," said Dornburg. "A ton of analytical, computational training that is going into this. Some of the students are learning graphic design and some in scientific writing."

In addition to the lab work, Dornburg encourages the students to be involved in

team-building exercises as they will work collaboratively in professional career settings. These team-building activities can be anything from designing a poster for a research proposal to giving elevator speeches to explain their research. This teaching method allows Dornburg to show the students how to work together to prepare them for a professional career.

"I really try to train everybody, aside from being a professional, to be a well-rounded scientist and having a well-rounded education on the scientific process," said Dornburg. "I don't like anybody just doing one thing over and over again. I prefer when they get that 30,000-foot view as well, and they figure out where they fit in, too...by doing that, we are giving everyone a leadership opportunity."

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Dornburg was a marine fishes and ichthyology researcher, the study of fish. He was a research curator of

ichthyology at the North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences, where he published many works. According to the Bioinformatics Research Center website, Dornburg's lab is researching "to develop a better understanding of the general principles that have given rise to the diversity of living vertebrates and enabled their persistence."

When asked if he would ever return to solely studying marine fishes and ichthyology, Dornburg said, "The weird thing about science is that as you work on a topic, you discover more, you ask more questions and there's no going back. The same thing goes for all the marine work and all the fishing genetics that we've been doing."

"We view evolutionary biology as a historical science, but I think it's time that we don't just learn about the history, but we learn from it and understand what that means for our future," said Dornburg.





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UNC CHARLOTTE WELCOMES NEW CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER

UNC Charlotte hires Brandon Wolfe to serve as the inaugural chief diversity officer to promote diversity, equity and inclusion on campus

by Kathryn Caudill
Staff Writer

On Nov. 1, Dr. Brandon Wolfe began his new role as UNC Charlotte's associate vice chancellor for diversity and inclusion and inaugural chief diversity officer (CDO). Wolfe will be a Chancellor's Cabinet member and will work closely with Chancellor Gaber to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion on campus.

"While we know that Charlotte is relatively diverse and we've done well in some areas, we can be better. This is our opportunity to leverage our standing to facilitate an even greater sense of institutional excellence and take our place as a state, regional, national and global leader," said Wolfe.

According to Wolfe, UNC Charlotte's student body is currently composed of 46% self-identified ethnic and racial minorities and is growing. According to the UNC Charlotte Diversity website, 49% of the student population is female. UNC Charlotte is also eighth in the United States for African American students with a bachelor's degree in physical sciences and 14th in the United States for African American students with a bachelor's degree in computing.

"That's good news, but there are existing opportunities to better diversify our faculty and staff across the campus," added Wolfe.

UNC Charlotte's Office of Diversity and Inclusion was created in the fall 2020 semester, where the position of CDO was developed and filled by Dr. Cheryl Waites-Spellman as the interim special assistant. This was an important pillar of Chancellor Gaber's plans for the university. The creation of this office follows a petition posted online

in 2016 directed then to Chancellor Dubois asking for the creation of such an office at UNC Charlotte.

"I would best describe my position as a strategic leader who works cohesively alongside students, faculty, and staff to create and nourish an inclusive campus environment where all can feel welcome, protected, valued, and given the tools and opportunities necessary to thrive in their workplace or educational experiences," said Wolfe.

"This position is important to us because we understand that in order for this to happen, we must be intentional and proactive in our approach to eliminating the barriers to full participation and benefits," said Wolfe.

Waites-Spellman used her interim term to map out all of the existing diversity and inclusion efforts at the university.

"The database is massive, and it has helped me to conceptualize the amount of already present student, faculty and staff partners," said Wolfe.

Wolfe is currently taking a listening and learning tour of the campus to understand how people view his office and what roles diversity and inclusion play in their lives.

Wolfe will then present the University with this information. At the same time, "continuously report[ing] out to you all for validity and reliability as we begin the process of creating a framework and a sustainable structure for us to synergize our efforts and address diversity and inclusion priorities—while making adjustments along the way."

Wolfe plans to continue to shape

Waites-Spellman's strategic diversity plan and institute an inclusion student advisory board and create a staff and faculty institution-wide strategic think tank to raise awareness.

Wolfe intends to continue, "meeting people where they are and keeping my door or inbox open to listen and learn from our university community. Their feedback will not only aid in informing our work but will ensure that our intent matches our impact."

Wolfe was selected from a national search process and one of three finalists for the position by a search committee of 11 members. The other finalists include Dr. Fanchon Glover and Dr. Miceal Jennings. The finalists were chosen via specific application criteria and a 90-minute Zoom interview. Finalists then were on campus for a day-and-a-half for in-person interviews and meetings with stakeholders. Finally, they were given a virtual forum where students, faculty and staff could ask questions and bring forward concerns.

Since 2016, Wolfe has served at the University of Alabama at Birmingham as assistant vice president for campus and community engagement in the Office of the Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Wolfe also holds a doctorate in administration of higher education as well as much other postgraduate training from Auburn University.

"I am confident in Brandon's vision, and I look forward to working with him and all of you on this important work," said Chancellor Gaber.

HUNGER AWARENESS MONTH AT UNC CHARLOTTE

Food drives and events held to help raise awareness for food insecurity

by Kathleen Cochrane
Intern

November is known as Hunger Awareness Month, and there have been numerous events and food drives around campus to raise awareness.

The Jamil Niner Food Pantry held a campaign called “Swipe out Hunger” that allows students to donate their extra meal swipes to students who may need them.

“Not every student can have a meal plan. There are food insecure students here on campus, and there are students who have meal plans who perhaps don’t use all of their meal swipes. This is the way to donate those extra meal swipes that may go unused, to help your peers here on campus so that they can have access to healthy nutritious food,” said Jessica Dormady, assistant director of leadership and community engagement at Jamile Niner Food Pantry.

Students are able to donate these meal swipes on the mobile ordering app or by going to the front desk of Sovi to donate in person.

Dining services also partnered with Chartwells Higher Education to hold a Thank-Ful Friendsgiving event at SoVi on Nov. 18.

The event featured a classic thanksgiving menu with staples such as turkey, stuffing and sweet potato pie. They also had a thankful van at the event for students to write notes about what or who they are thankful for.

Both of these events were centered around helping food-insecure students.

“If you look at the data, especially national data, we see a large percentage of students who are food insecure. That is the case here at UNC Charlotte. I believe our data is on trend with the national data,” said Dormandy. “Students who are hungry, they can’t focus on their class, they can’t focus on studies and achieving their goals, and that’s what we want from

Photo of Jamil Student Pantry
courtesy of Niner Times file photo

all of our UNC Charlotte students is to be able to focus on their studies and get their degree and achieve their education goals.”

“The most recent data that we have at UNC Charlotte that I know of, according to a 2019 study, 32% of UNC Charlotte students are food insecure, based on the USDA definition,” said Dormandy.

The dining team donated 100 meal vouchers to help food-insecure students. The campus also hosted a non-perishable food drive from Nov. 8-18, and dining services promised to donate 25lbs of food for every 50 cans that were donated.

The food pantry also has a lot of volunteer opportunities for students that want to help more. They can sign up through Niner Engage.

“We did have volunteer opportunities with Swipe Out Hunger, we had the tables at Crown, and so we usually have two, sometimes three volunteers at the table max. We’re still in the pandemic, but a lot of those restrictions have lifted with the vaccination and everything so we’re really eager to get back into in-person volunteering.”

“We love our volunteers, and they’re definitely our lifeblood. We couldn’t do it without all of our great volunteers and donors, but we have waitlists right now. We do have group volunteer opportunities at the pantry,” said Dormandy.

The food pantry is also holding a “Giving Tuesday” campaign that goes through to Nov. 30. This campaign is a way to donate to the food pantry virtually to support the 215 students that go to them for food each week.

People can visit the Amazon Wishlist to see what donations are needed

As of Friday, Nov. 26, the campaign has received 78 gifts and \$5,341. The donation window will close at midnight on Nov. 30.



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WHY PROTECT A PREDATOR?

Follow-up editorial about sexual misconduct involving professor

by NT Editorial Staff

This article was written on behalf of the Niner Times Editorial Board. It is not representative of Student Niner Media. All editors approve of the content of this article.

An entire semester has passed since the Niner Times published an opinion article confronting the sexual misconduct scandal involving Senior Lecturer Robert McEachnie of the history department at UNC Charlotte. Almost 10 months have elapsed since the Charlotte Observer first broke the news about McEachnie, complete with a \$40,000 court settlement.

UNC Charlotte continues to do what it does best: ignore the student body and run business as usual. The Niner Times felt it was imperative to use our voices to articulate the truth, especially for those unable to do so.

The following is a compilation of select opinions from the Niner Times Editorial Staff about this issue. Each editor has posed a question addressing the irresponsibility of the University for refusing to fire Robert McEachnie.

Isaac Naylor, Asst. Opinion Editor

How did they miss the point?

When I wrote the article “Pink Slip Requested” in mid-September about the sexual misconduct committed by McEachnie, I never expected such an overly-critical response from the University.

Point-by-point and line-by-line, my writing was dissected, debated and criticized. University representatives quickly called out grammatical and semantic errors but had little to say about the article’s content. Had the same urgency and zero-tolerance been applied to the sexual assault survivors of McEachnie and others,

this campus might be a better place.

However, McEachnie can sleep well at night knowing that he never needed tenure to have job security—only an employer willing to cover for him.

Ambiguous university policies are to blame for facilitating much of the professor-student misconduct that occurs on campus. Even if the University revises these rules, the problem would only be fixed on paper. The University needs to show its wallet by compensating all the tuition and fees for the survivors of McEachnie.

As I said in my previous article: “All past and future expenses through undergraduate and graduate studies for these students should be covered as part of the University’s effort toward reconciliation for the survivors.” Anything less would be a tragedy.

April Carte, Editor-in-Chief

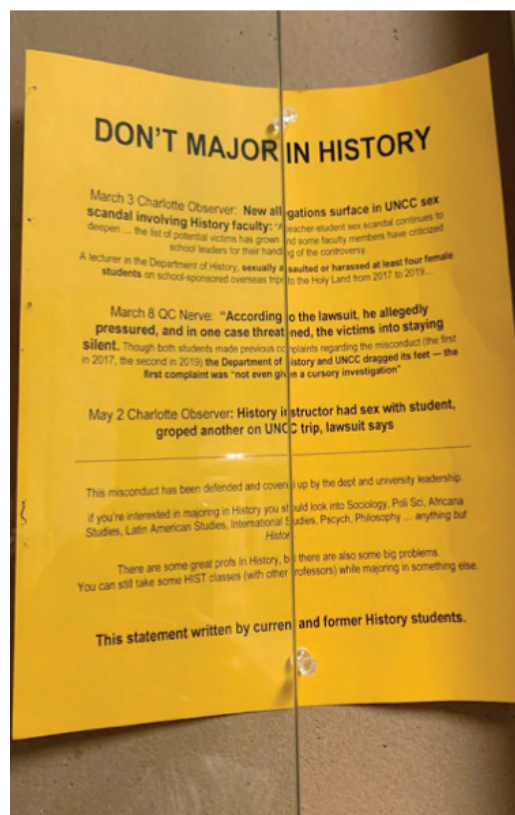
Why aren’t they listening to us?

It’s hard to put into words the feeling I get knowing that a school I adore so much, can choose not listen to students’ voices. The entire situation feels swept under the rug. Sure, he’s teaching remote courses now and has been demoted to “senior lecturer,” but he still has an office space here. His face is still attached to the history department.

One day, I was walking through Burson, and a bright yellow sign caught my eye. The sign read: “Don’t major in history.” The first thing I did was snap a picture, partially because I had a feeling that the next time I would walk through that building, the signs wouldn’t be up. To no surprise, the signs were removed. I don’t know exactly who created these posters, who took them down, or if they were hung anywhere else (even for a short period of time),

but I do know that they shouldn’t have had to be created in the first place.

Imagine trying to figure out what major or minor you want to pursue. Or better yet, touring UNC Charlotte and seeing a sign like that. For some students, it may not turn them away. It may just mean they need to pay more attention to which professors they sign up under. For others, that may completely change their academic path.



It’s also worth mentioning that Title IX created mirror clings and placed them in select on-campus restrooms to remind students to report sexual assault. While I want to applaud the University for these gentle reminders, I can’t help but feel like it is just a hollow attempt at trying to care for the student body.

Photo of “Don’t Major in History” sign in Burson by April Carte

How can you remind students to report when it’s obvious that the reports are not always attended to properly? Reminding students to report is not enough if they don’t see the predator’s repercussions.

It’s not our responsibility to clean up this mess, but it is clear the administration doesn’t care that he is still on payroll. I have always been told to “leave it better than you found it.” As I celebrate my achievements next spring when I turn my tassel, it will be difficult to feel like I am truly leaving the school better than I found it with McEachnie still around.

Isabella Perryman, Asst. Copy Editor

Is the University protecting us, or itself?

During a time of global plight, the University wasted no time setting precautions to protect students and staff with mask requirements, social distancing and providing online courses. This sounds fantastic, of course. You think your university is protecting you until you log in to your required liberal studies course only to realize your instructor is a sexual predator. This is an unfortunate reality for those unlucky enough to end up in McEachnie’s Spring 2022 liberal studies courses, which include LBST 2101, sections 216 and 217.

We could urge you not to take his classes and boycott the entire thing, but we know it’s not that simple—you need those courses to graduate. The UNC Charlotte class registration portal shows that out of 33 sections for LBST 2101: Western History and Culture, only 11 are offered online. These online courses, including McEachnie’s, are filled besides two of the synchronous courses. It is clear that online courses have become more of the norm in the last few years, and you deserve to safely take courses that work best with your schedule, especially

if you are immune-compromised and can still only take online courses.

What does it say about our university that the only option for these students is to take an online course with a sexual predator? He should not even be an option in your course selection process, and while the University did a great job protecting us from Covid, they ensured that a sexual predator would have access to some of the most vulnerable.

Madison Dobrzanski, News Editor

Why is the University accommodating a sexual predator?

Merriam-Webster defines an “accommodation” as “providing of what is needed or desired for convenience,” or “a reconciliation of differences: settlement.” As a result of the settlement, McEachnie is not allowed to teach in person or study abroad. My first thought upon hearing this was, “it is like they are accommodating him.”

The fact that McEachnie continues to work at UNC Charlotte is upsetting for many reasons. However, there is a lot that outrages me about the University’s adjustments to McEachnie’s workload and class schedule. According to WSOC, in the settled case, the relationship’s communication was through “code names on Twitter and other social media sites.” A study abroad trip is merely where it became physical, but virtual contexts are where the predatory behavior began. A second reason these adjustments infuriate me is that the lawsuit claims that McEachnie “took advantage of the female student’s serious psychological conditions and showed her other students’ papers, such as grades and detailed assessments of academic work, implying he could do the same with her private information.” This predator does not need in-person courses to take advantage of his students and disrupt their education.

As someone with a serious psychological condition and documented disability, this hits home. This disgusts me, and most importantly, scares me. Showing McEachnie consideration and accommodation shows that the University prioritizes his comfort over students’ comfort.

Limiting him to virtual courses

does not protect students. Limiting his ability to study abroad doesn’t either. The accommodations prioritize his convenience and his paycheck. They are an empty attempt by the University to appear as if they did something about his behavior, but nothing to disrupt his life.

UNC Charlotte can only protect students by doing what they should have done months ago: fire McEachnie.

Brandon Mitchell, Layout Editor

How did McEachnie get away with it?

The question above stems from privilege and willful ignorance. It’s easy to be reactionary in these moments, and it’s warranted to be angry with the current situation. But as members of the UNC Charlotte community, our tweets, verbal complaints and even this article are empty performances of justice if actions don’t back them.

The university justice system is a farce that cares more about reputation than the safety of its students. Title IX does just enough to help survivors to keep them complacent.

In most cases, Title IX policy allows complainants to decide whether or not to move forward with an investigation. It is a policy seemingly built upon empathy and equity, but its results are far from that. According to WCNC, the University received 242 cases of sexual misconduct in the 2019-2020 school year, and of those, only 22 resulted in a formal investigation.

The policy gives survivors an illusion of choice. When they strive for justice, they are met with several systemic barriers. Firstly, social pressures keep women from talking about their experiences. Due to the misogynistic views instilled in our society, their friends and family might see them as the problem. Secondly, there’s an economic burden to the legal process that many students can’t afford. Finally, even if they do bring their case to court, there is a decent chance they will lose, and those previous barriers become worse. Students within marginalized communities face these barriers and many more. The system is rigged against them from start to end.

Title IX is a bandage on a gaping wound. It is not inherently bad, but it is a

compromise to the misogyny, racism and classism of the University and the greater community. UNC Charlotte is a corrupt system, and everyone who benefits from it is also partially responsible for that corruption. There are good people at our university, and I’d like to think most are. But we all share that responsibility to make things better, and if we run from that responsibility, we are not good.

Accountability isn’t a witch hunt; it is consistent action in the face of tyranny. You are either an active participant in equality or an enemy of it.

Hiral Patel, Opinion Editor

What are your options?

According to the University Policy 504, also known as Title IX Grievance policy, investigation and punishment of sexual misconduct by a faculty or staff member must occur under the grounds of University Policy 502, which states, “The University may be obligated to investigate allegations of sexual harassment or interpersonal violence.”

This policy explains potential punishments a staff member can face after the Title IX coordinator, Office of the Provost and human resources unanimously finds them in violation of university policy. However, the fact that the University ‘may’ investigate speaks louder than any other provision in this policy—it’s an obligation, not a demand.

It is no surprise how terribly the University responded to survivors of McEachnie under vaguely worded sexual misconduct policies. The settled lawsuit is evident of that. This settlement wasn’t enough, but the legal system did something, unlike the University.

Many students may feel discouraged from going to the Title IX office because of its reputation from the McEachnie scandal. Although experiences vary, the lack of clarity shows how vague sexual assault resources are on campus.

The Niner Times is currently conducting a survey about sexual assault. An anonymous respondee explained that “there were a lot of options I had no idea existed until I met with them [Title IX] because a mandatory reporter found out about my situation. The University should better

advertise it as a place to get help instead of just another bureaucratic office.”

Below, we provided local resources, including survivor and trauma resource centers and programs to file violence-protective orders and no-contact orders. Domestic violence shelters and hope-line services are also provided.

Though the chances of litigation without costs are slim, these local sources can help you create a safety plan.

Safe Alliance

<https://www.safealliance.org/>

601 East Fifth Street-Administrative Office Suite 400 | Charlotte, NC 28202
Tel: 704.332.9034 Fax: 704.373.1604
Email: info@safealliance.org

Charlotte Reproductive Action Network

Text the hotline at 704-703-7656 | Monday – Saturday between 9 a.m. and 10 p.m.

Editorial Staff

What’s Next?

The Niner Times Editorial Board wants to raise awareness regarding the University’s failure to remove a sexual predator. Although McEachnie’s classes are asynchronous, it is unethical to allow him to remain in contact with students.

We demand that University leadership uses their moral judgment to terminate McEachnie’s employment. Until the University takes this step, we also urge students to take precautions by reporting cases of sexual misconduct and publicly acknowledge McEachnie’s involvement on campus. The Niner Times stands with the survivors of Robert McEachnie.

The Niner Times aims to share all survivors’ stories truthfully and delicately. We have created a response form for survivors to anonymously tell their stories. This form is not a way to officially report but lets us potentially use information and quotes to report on sexual assault at UNC Charlotte. If you or someone you know feels comfortable, please complete the survey or share the following link: <https://forms.gle/BrVGL7dsuevNXHxw9>



PIKMIN BLOOM

Nintendo and Niantic team up to provide a great alternative to other pedometer apps

by Jake Pierce
Asst. Arts & Culture Editor

Photo of Pikmin Bloom
courtesy of Pikmin Bloom

With the release of 2016's "Pokémon Go," Niantic and Nintendo captured a brand-new, "lightning-in-a-bottle" kind of audience. Over five years later, that game still has a large and thriving community (including right here on our beloved campus). Niantic has since released several titles seeking to recapture the same charm of "Pokémon Go" to varying levels of success. However, the studio's most recent effort, "Pikmin Bloom" goes in a slightly different direction.

Developed in direct collaboration with Nintendo, "Pikmin Bloom" may initially look very familiar to fans of Niantic's past efforts. Gameplay sees your customizable avatar appear on a GPS-powered mockup of your surrounding area. The goal is simple: explore the area around you, get out and take walks around your neighborhood, meet new people and make the world a brighter place, one step at a time. It's a worthy goal and something that once again echoes strongly back to Niantic's messaging around the launch of "Pokémon Go." However, "Pikmin Bloom" is much more supplementary in nature than that game, and that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Progression in "Pikmin Bloom" is built

entirely around your step count. Should you choose to allow it, the app will track your activity even when not open. As long as your phone is powered on and with you, "Pikmin Bloom" will record your steps as you walk, jog or run. Upon first starting the game, players are given a handful of sprouts which will, after enough steps, grow into adorable creatures known as Pikmin. Once plucked from their sproutlings, the Pikmin will begin to follow your avatar around as you walk. The main benefit that Pikmin grant is the ability to gain different types of flowers that players can choose to leave in trails behind them as they walk. Planting flowers not only gives players a bonus to their sprout growth, but any flowers that you plant behind you will stay on the in-game map for a period of time, (about a week in my experience.) Since our campus seems to have an active community building around this game, the map of the area in and around campus is often filled to the brim with all different kinds of flowers. It can be incredibly rewarding to not only make your own mark on the map with your favorite type of flower but also to scroll around the map and see what sorts of flowers other players have

been using to mark their own paths.

As players work to bolster the ranks of their Pikmin squad, the game will begin to dole out more and more ways to make use of your friendly little helpers. For example, Expeditions allow you to send off a group of Pikmin to pick up items from the surrounding area, including more sprouts, fruits that give access to new types of flowers, and even cute costumes for your Pikmin to dress up in. Challenges are another type of activity, allowing up to five players to send a team of Pikmin to a patch of mushrooms on the map to dig for buried treasures. All of these activities can be tracked by the game entirely in the background, needing nothing more from the player than to select a group of Pikmin and activate the quest. As I played more and more, I began to fall into a bit of a rhythm, usually logging into the app sometime in the morning to set tasks, expeditions and challenges for the day, and then checking in again at night to see how the day's tasks went, check on my step count, harvest any newly-grown Pikmin and reap the rewards from any completed Expeditions or Challenges.

"Pikmin Bloom" is decidedly more

personal and single-player focused than a game like "Pokémon Go." But again, this isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's a little less "game" and a little more "fitness app," so anyone looking for a deep, console-quality gameplay experience on their phone may want to keep looking elsewhere, as they will likely find what's on offer here to be far too simplistic and rudimentary to keep them invested. However, if you're looking for a fun way to keep track of your activity or want to start walking or running for fitness and feel like a gamified way of tracking progress may help you stick to your routine better, I would recommend "Pikmin Bloom" wholeheartedly. Checking up on my squad of adorable plant-based pals has become an integrated and anticipated part of my daily routine over the past few weeks. With future content updates and support planned for the coming months, I can't wait to keep going and see how Niantic evolves the idea from this point.

Final Score

8/10

HOW TO PREPARE FOR GRADUATION

Tips and important information for December graduates

by Julie Dam
Staff Writer

Halton Arena photo
courtesy of Charlotte Athletics

Mid-year graduation ceremonies happen in less than a month, which means it is time to start preparing! Here are some things you should do before your graduation so that you are not scrambling at the last minute. As a December graduate myself, I will be following my advice.

Collect your graduation cap and gown. You can pick up these items for free at the university bookstore until Nov. 30, and you must bring your student ID.

If you are graduating with academic distinctions, you can also buy a set of cords for \$17. If you are a member of the Honors College or other organizations, check with your faculty advisors about getting honor cords and graduation stoles, as they are not available for purchase at the bookstore.

Reserve your guest E-tickets. You can invite up to six people to your graduation this year. Register your account with the

Charlotte Athletics Student Tickets page and reserve the tickets by the priority deadline on Nov. 29 at 5:00 p.m. You will be notified by Dec. 2 if any extra tickets are available. Once you get your tickets, you should get an email confirmation and a separate email for your mobile tickets.

If you opted for the Print-at-Home option, you need to print your tickets and have your guests present the physical tickets on the day of the ceremony. If you opted for the Mobile option, you should access your tickets, then download and save them to your Apple Wallet or Google Pay. Send the digital tickets to your guests and have them ready to scan before entering the arena.

Plan your outfit and any decorations. Now you can worry about what to wear with your cap and gown. The University does not have a dress code for the ceremony, but it is customary to wear

formal attire. You are also allowed to decorate your cap. I will be decorating mine, though I do not know what kind of design I want yet. Get to campus 90 minutes before your ceremony starts. You will need to check-in at the outdoor tented area between the Cato College of Education building and the Barnhardt Student Activity Center to pick up your name card. You will line up with

other graduating students in the practice gym, and you must have a UNC Charlotte ID or a photo ID and your UNC Charlotte ID number to participate.

Luckily, the campus parking situation will be relaxed for the most part. All UNC Charlotte parking lots and decks will be open for commencement, and parking will be free for everyone. There will be parking attendants and police officers stationed around campus to help direct traffic, so you can travel separately from your guests to check in on time.

The doors open 90 minutes before each ceremony. All guests will need a ticket to enter the Dale F. Halton Arena, whether they arrive altogether or not. There are no designated accessible seating tickets, so arriving early is recommended. Closed captioning will be provided, and Section 132 has limited seating for individuals with vision impairments plus one accompanying person.

The following includes the dates and times for each ceremony, as listed on the commencement website:

Friday, Dec. 17, 2:00 p.m.

The Graduate School (Doctoral, Master's and Graduate Certificates for all programs)

Saturday, Dec. 18, 10:00 a.m. (Bachelor's)

College of Arts + Architecture,
Cato College of Education and
College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Saturday, Dec. 18, 3:00 p.m. (Bachelor's)

Belk College of Business, College of
Computing & Informatics, The William
States Lee College of Engineering, and
College of Health & Human Services

Note: Masks will be required for all graduates and guests.

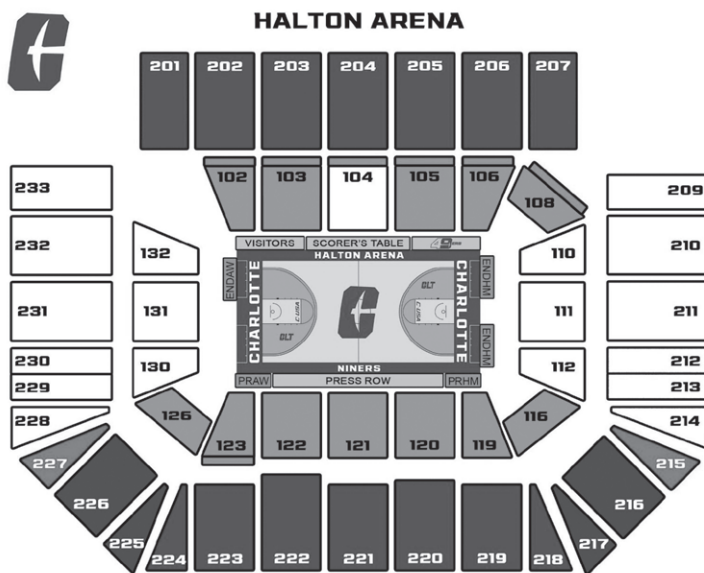
The name card that you receive when you check-in has a unique barcode on it. The barcode will be scanned when you walk across the stage, and your name will be displayed on the jumbotron and announced. You should have already recorded your name through MarchingOrder to assist with pronunciation. Do not panic if you have not done this step—your name will still be announced.

Get your diploma. Make sure there are no financial holds on your NinerNET account. Your diploma should be mailed six to eight weeks after the commencement ceremony, which is sometime between Jan. 29 and Feb. 12. If you do not receive your diploma after this time frame, email Niner Central at ninercentral@uncc.edu.

Take your senior pictures. You can do this step before or after commencement, depending on your schedule and personal preference. Here are a few scenic locations on campus you might consider: Belk Plaza, Student Union overlook, the UNC Charlotte sign by North Tryon, the top-level of a parking deck at sunset, and Academic buildings that hold some significance to you.

Congratulations to all December 2021 graduates! I see you, and I am with you. Good luck next semester to all May 2022 graduates. You are almost to the finish line!

For any further questions about graduation, contact commencement@uncc.edu.



a new ADVENTURE



Charlotte's Bailey Rice talks new experience in America

by Juwan Watson
Staff Writer

Bailey Rice making a play in the AFL in Australia
Photo courtesy of Getty Images/Chris Hyde

Adjusting to living in a new country is tough. Adjusting to a new sport is also hard, but it has been an exciting opportunity Charlotte football punter Bailey Rice has welcomed with open arms.

The 24-year-old just finished his first year playing organized football, coming from Australia to Charlotte, NC.

As a kid growing up in Australia, Rice played Australian-rules football, otherwise known as rugby. He played rugby for a large portion of his life. His father also played in the Australian rule football league, so Rice has always been close to the sport.

"My dad played professional Aussie rules football, so I grew up playing it, and I was lucky enough to get drafted and play professionally straight out of high school at 18," said Rice.

"That was a surreal experience with the crowds there and the crowds here. It's not new, but it's a completely different experience. It's a cool sport not many people know about in America, but I'm sure if they give it a chance, they would like it," he added.

Rice played four years in the league, playing 11 games with the St. Kilda Saints in 2018, which is where his father played 100 games in his career. Rice

was selected as a father-son selection in the 2015 national draft at pick 49. It was destiny for Rice to come and play for the 49ers after that draft pick.

"I didn't really think much about it until somebody told me about it. So it's pretty funny, and it seems like it was something meant to happen," Rice said with a chuckle.

As for Rice making the change from rugby to football, he got the chance to see a familiar friend beforehand.

"I played for four years, and when I was 22, I got cut from Australian rules football," said Rice. So I had a mate who played at Auburn, Aaron Siposs. He

punts for the Philadelphia Eagles now. So I came to America when I was around 23 or 22 and went to Auburn. I watched him punt, and that got me interested."

After that, he went back to Australia interested in being a punter and playing football and trained with The Punt Factory Australia.

"They had just started up in Australia, and they got all these new guys. The Coach that I worked with, Aaron Perez, was great, and there were also four other coaches," mentioned Rice. "It is like an academy, they have competitions, and you work on your technique, and they

help you get scouted by teams here."

Once he got recruited to play here at Charlotte, Rice was excited to finally play. He had seen it on TV but being able to experience it in person is different and exciting for Rice.

"I was more excited about experiencing college football life," said Rice about making the change. "It's televised a lot back home, so to be able to play the game that I was watching at home is nice, and also creating new relationships with people and making some awesome friends out here is surreal, to be honest."

Though there were some things he had to get used to, Rice had never played in a helmet and shoulder pads. As a result, he had to overcome a sharp learning curve.

"I had already experienced it back home with The Punt Factory working with pads and helmets you can put on," said Rice. "Obviously different than the Aussie rule with the collision, but you still have big collisions in this too. The pads can restrict you with your ball drop and the helmet with your vision," mentioned Rice.

"Something I do miss is tackling. I did that a lot back home. But growing up, all

I used to do is kick the ball," said Rice.

"I know that Americans here like throwing and doing different positions like punting and kicking. That is sometimes available here at colleges because they want someone that kicks, and that was my strength," laughed Rice.

Rice has been able to adjust well to the new environment that he is in. As a first-year, he has goals going forward like all athletes.

"To just keep improving. The first year is all about improving, really. The end goal is to try and make the NFL, but I gotta take that year after year. Then academics and coming out with a degree

cause not everyone gets drafted," said Rice.

In just one year playing American football, Rice has found success. He averaged 42.3 yards per punt during the 2021 season on 40 attempts. Four of Rice's punts have been over 50 yards, and his longest of the season totaled 65 yards.

He may be one of the oldest players on the roster, but Rice has plenty of time to achieve his dreams of making it to the next level as he has three years of eligibility left.

"That was a surreal experience with the crowds there and the crowds here."

"...creating new relationships with people and making some awesome friends out here is surreal..."

LEAVING A LEGACY

Charlotte volleyball's Bethany Clayton reflects on her time as a 49er

by Gabie Stanfield
Staff Writer

Charlotte's Bethany Clayton in a game against South Carolina State
Photo courtesy of Charlotte Athletics

Fourth-year Bethany Clayton says farewell to her volleyball career and her time at Charlotte after setting multiple career highs this season. Not only is she a significant asset on the team with her lively personality and leadership skills, but she also contributed significantly to the team's success in statistical areas.

The outside hitter has played in 185 sets throughout her career and has totaled 148 kills. Clayton has 502 attempts in her career, and she has a hitting percentage of .167.

This season, Clayton reached her career highs in sets and matches and appeared in 74 sets and 23 matches. In addition, her assist record, and total attempts are at an all-time high this season, as she recorded eight total assists and 251 attempts.

The Pinnacle, NC native, has made impeccable progress during her time at Charlotte, especially after facing tough challenges along the way, such as recovering from knee surgery her second year.

"Coming back from that knee surgery was something I'm really proud of because it was not easy," said Clayton.

"It was probably one of the hardest things I've ever had to do in my life because I didn't walk for 12 weeks. I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to compete that season, and making it back to compete for half the season is something I'm pretty proud of. I think it gave me a nice boost of confidence that has helped me throughout the rest of my career and in setting career highs and doing well in games."

Clayton's presence on the team had an enormous impact on her coaches and teammates alike. Coach Weatherington expands on what Clayton being on the team has meant to her over the last four years.

"Bethany has been steady for us since the day she arrived," said Weatherington.

"She brings lightness, positivity and energy to the program and has from

the time she was a freshman. She's very consistent in how she works every day in practice, but you know, it's something about her heart and her spirit that when she comes in, it just makes everybody feel a little bit better," she added.

"Even on the floor, she just always has a smile on her face, and she's just one of those teammates that everyone wants. I've just really enjoyed coaching her. I think she's had a breakout season this year. She battled some injuries coming up, and then watching the way she worked back from that, she was very gritty about it, and this year she just brings a leadership spirit that has helped us win some important games."

There is a feeling of mutual respect between Weatherington and Clayton. According to Clayton, they have created a strong bond over the last four years,

making playing the sport all that more enjoyable and comfortable.

"It's been really good because the coaches care about you as a person too and not just as a player," said Clayton. "It's really good having that trust in the relationship and being able to know I can talk to them about other things than volleyball, which I think helps the volleyball part because I know that they're there for me and that I can trust them."

Clayton's welcoming spirit and true leadership qualities have made it easy for Charlotte volleyball to feel her presence. When it comes to the legacy she wants to leave as her time at Charlotte comes to an end, Clayton hopes that a winning culture will be visible on the horizon for the teams that will follow her.

"I hope to leave behind a culture of

winning," said Clayton. "We've done so well, especially since my first year of winning more games and going to conference tournaments more and winning conference tournament games, so I hope to see that continue and be improved upon."

Throughout her career, Clayton has gained a wealth of knowledge. With many mentors and coaches to learn from, many life lessons and pieces of advice have been offered. But, it is relatively straightforward when it comes to the best piece of advice she's been given.

"The best piece of advice is honestly, just to enjoy it," said Clayton. "It goes by so fast. I can't believe I'm done with my volleyball career. I think for me, enjoying the time—because you won't get it back—and just being there with my team, in the moment and hanging out with them and loving them and enjoying all that volleyball has given me has been important."

Clayton has learned skills such as organization and time management from being a student-athlete. They won't be the only things that she takes with her into life outside of Charlotte, as the relationships and the life she built within Charlotte volleyball will follow her as well. Clayton touches on what she hopes to leave her teammates with when she goes.

"I feel like I am a pretty fun teammate and bring a light into the locker room, so I hope that that's how they remember me," said Clayton. "I hope that other people can bring that too and keep things fun and entertaining and know that we want to win and this is a game, but we want to have fun while we're playing."

Clayton and the Charlotte women's volleyball team finished the season with an overall record of 12-13 and fell in the first round of the Conference-USA Championships to Rice in a 3-1 defeat.



A DISAPPOINTING ENDING

49ers lose 56-34, miss out on a bowl game



Charlotte finished their season at 5-7 with a 34-56 at ODU
Photos courtesy of Charlotte Athletics

by Joey Ellsworth
Staff Writer

After a 4-2 start to the season that included their first win over a Power 5 team against Duke, the Charlotte 49ers football team ended the season with a disappointing 56-34 loss to Old Dominion.

With the loss to ODU, Charlotte finishes the season with a record of 5-7.

Their conference record falls to 3-5 with the loss to Old Dominion. Of the seven C-USA East teams, Charlotte is tied for fifth in conference record.

“I fully expected to win the game,” said 49ers head coach Will Healy. “I didn’t want this to be the last week for these guys. I thought there were glimpses in the game where we played dominant football, but we weren’t consistent enough. It’s probably the story of our year.”

First Half

The first quarter belonged to ODU. With two rushing touchdowns, they took a 14-0 lead late in the first. It wasn’t just a dominant performance on offense for ODU, but there was nothing Charlotte could do to combat the ODU defense either. In Charlotte’s three offensive drives in the first quarter, two of them ended in interceptions while the other ended with a turnover on downs.

The second quarter was a bit more even on both ends, with each team scoring 14. ODU opened the quarter up with a TD to take a 21-0 lead, but Charlotte finally answered back on the next drive with a 19 yard Reynolds pass to Elijah

Spencer to put the Niners on the board.

ODU answered back with their fourth touchdown of the day with a 34-yard passing touchdown. The next time ODU was on offense, it was Charlotte who finally found an answer. Niner linebacker, Luke Martin, got the interception and returned it for a touchdown to bring the Niners within 14.

Second Half

The Niners found themselves down by 14 to start the second half and stopped ODU from scoring on the half’s opening drive. On the next drive for Charlotte, they drove down the field, 75 yards in just five plays, and scored a touchdown on a nine-yard pass to DuBose.

The Niners defense forced another punt on the next drive, and the offense again ended their drive with a touchdown thanks to a six-yard Calvin Camp rushing TD. Charlotte overcame their 21-0 deficit and, with six minutes remaining in the third quarter, were tied at 28. The Niners didn’t hold that lead for long. On the next drive, ODU scored a touchdown to take a 35-28 lead.

In the first five minutes of the fourth quarter, the only scoring that was done was two Jonathan Cruz field goals to bring the game to a very close 35-34, while ODU’s only drive-in that span ended in a Lance McMillan interception.

While Charlotte was down by just one point, ODU turned the game around

tremendously and embarrassed the Niners for the last seven minutes of the game.

ODU scored a touchdown on the next drive to finish off a 75-yard drive. Charlotte had the ball back in their hands, but it seemed ODU wanted it more. They forced a fumble and scored a touchdown on their drive.

Down 49-34, Charlotte was in bad shape but had the ball. ODU forced another fumble on the drive but this time returned it for a touchdown. When Charlotte got the ball back, they turned it over on downs, and ODU took the win 56-34.

“The turnovers hurt us,” said Healy.

The 49ers threw a pair of interceptions in the first half to go along with the two fumbles in the second half.

“We’ve had some really good opening drives and had a chance to create some early confidence and early energy and weren’t able to do it. Instead of us being up 7-0, they’re up 7-0,” said Healy. “Had some chances to get off field on third down. We weren’t able to do it. Broken tackles and some of those things. Not near clean enough.”

A huge hit for the Niners was penalties. Charlotte may have had more offensive yards than ODU 480-441 one Charlotte had 14 penalties for an insane 109 yards.

Stat Leaders

Despite an ugly loss to end the season, there were some Niners who had good games.

Grant DuBose, who joined the Niners over the summer, finished his first Charlotte season with a bang. He hauled in nine receptions for 94 yards and a touchdown. He finished the season first among all Niner players for receptions, receiving yards, receiving touchdowns, receiving yards per game, yards per reception and had the longest reception of the season.

Linebacker Luke Martin had an impressive game. He had a pick-six and also racked up a team-high: nine total tackles. The interception was the second of his career, while his first was just a couple of weeks ago when the Niners faced off against Rice.

Calvin Camp led the Niners in rushing with 90 yards on the ground on just 16 attempts. This gives him an average of 5.6 yards a carry, not to mention one of his runs ending in a touchdown. Shadrick Byrd also had an impressive rushing performance. Byrd ran for 72 yards on 13 attempts. His yards per carry was 5.5, just behind Camp.

This loss ends the Niner season with a disappointing result. Just two years ago, Charlotte finished a positive 7-6. The Niners will look to improve next season with Healey back at the helm.