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GLOBAL TIES

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Photo by Niyathi Sulkunte

COVID-19 ON CAMPUS: ONE MONTH CHECK-IN

How UNC Charlotte is adjusting to Covid-19 during the fall 2021 semester

by Kathryn Caudill
Staff Writer

Photo of campus signs relating to COVID-19
by Jade Suszek

Fall 2021 is the first semester of full operations since the beginning of the pandemic, and Covid-19 has not affected normal university operations.

As of Tuesday, Sept. 28, UNC Charlotte has 83% of residential students vaccinated, 78% of total students with an on-campus presence are vaccinated and 88% of total employees with an on-campus presence are vaccinated. In comparison, UNC Chapel Hill has 93% of students vaccinated, 68% of East Carolina University on-campus students are vaccinated and 58% of all Appalachian State University students are vaccinated.

Unvaccinated face-to-face students, faculty and staff are required to participate in testing, except proof of vaccination. In addition, all unvaccinated non-residential face-to-face students, faculty, and staff are required to participate in weekly mitigation testing either on campus or submit the results from an off-campus testing location. Vaccination proof for UNC Charlotte requires a photo of the vaccination card to be uploaded, which is then examined by experts for authenticity.

UNC Charlotte further focuses its efforts on providing students, staff and faculty with numerous comprehensive resources to protect from Covid-19. Since the pandemic, UNC Charlotte has put the "Niner Health Check" into place, a daily survey for students, faculty, and staff to monitor their symptoms and health status. UNC Charlotte has also dedicated multiple testing sites on campus in addition to contact tracing.

Since July 2020, 69,241 COVID-19 tests have been administered on campus, including mitigation and athletics and those who have been tested multiple times. Of that number, 1,225 have returned positive, leading to a positivity rate of 1.7%.

Tests provided on campus are available to both students and employees that have been evaluated and directed by the Student Health Center or their own health care provider to be tested. The Niner Nation Cares website says that the university required all unvaccinated

face-to-face students to be tested before the beginning of the semester. Proof of vaccination was the only way to be exempt from that requirement. During the semester, there is no cost for testing for students and employees who are symptomatic or have been in close contact with someone positive for Covid-19. At this time, there is no on-campus testing for antibodies.

UNC Charlotte has also enlisted a team of researchers to design the predictive wastewater-testing program that has since received national recognition, including being on the front page of the New York Times. The wastewater testing has been found to show evidence of the presence of COVID-19 prior to the feeling of symptoms.

UNC Charlotte has also received recognition by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities as the 2021 winner of the Excellence and Innovation Award in the Urban Category for its Covid-19 response effort.

Other partners of UNC Charlotte include Atrium Health who has provided Covid-19 vaccine clinics on campus.

Through these efforts, UNC Charlotte has been able to maintain an infection rate below the county average and afforded the opportunity to have a "normal" fall semester.

As of Thursday, Sept. 30, there have only been four Niner Notices indicating Covid-19 clusters that have been identified since Aug. 30, 2021. These Niner Notices include both clusters on and off campus.

The Niner Times conducted a survey regarding students' thoughts, feelings, and concerns at UNC Charlotte in terms of Covid-19 protocols and protocol enforcement.* In this survey, it was found that 70.6% of the respondents believed that more than half the students in their in-person classes wear masks properly by covering both their nose and mouth. According to the respondents, 64.7% believe that all of their professors enforce social distancing and properly wearing masks. 58.8% of respondents feel safe from Covid-19 in their

in-person classes, while 58.8% feel safe from Covid-19 in common areas such as dining halls, Student Union and the UREC. 64.7% of respondents believe that University protocols are adequate, while 23.5% believe they should be stricter, and 11.8% believe they should be more relaxed.

*Due to a limited sample size, the survey results are not representative of the entire UNC Charlotte population.





UNC CHARLOTTE HOSTS MODEL UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE

University to host “Carolinas Conference” from Oct. 15-17

by Danielle Savinovich
Intern

From Oct. 15-17, UNC Charlotte will host the “Carolinas Conference,” the University’s annual Model United Nations (MUN) conference open to high school and college delegates. Rowe’s opening and closing ceremonies will be in all other portions of the conference taking place in Fretwell and Denny. A conference is a student-run event planned and run by experienced members and alumni of UNC Charlotte’s MUN team.

According to UNC Charlotte’s MUN website, MUN “allows students to roleplay delegates to the United Nations (UN) and simulate UN committees.”

This year’s conference will be the first in-person conference since the COVID-19 pandemic forced the conference to be conducted virtually in 2020. According to Ramya Ezhilarasan, the secretary-general of the conference, they are planning a safe conference.

“A lot of planning goes into an event like this,” said Ezhilarasan. “Planning usually starts over the summer and involves booking rooms on campus, submitting emails to other colleges and high schools across the state and nearby states such as South Carolina and

Georgia, and even as far away as Canada and Mexico, and gathering volunteers to help write speeches that need to be debated.”

As of Oct. 3, 210 people, including UNC Charlotte students, are signed up for the conference. However, this number may rise to at least 240 attendees, with some attending virtually. There is no maximum or minimum capacity for people attending, whether it is solo or in groups.

At least 30 countries such as Afghanistan, South Africa, Australia, France, Germany, Norway, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States will be represented during the conference. The international organizations represented during the conference include the Disarmament and International Security (DISEC), the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

“The conference is expected to be a great weekend filled with new ideas and solutions that the members of the real United Nations currently struggle with, along with other world events

such as getting vaccine passports,” said Ezhilarasan. Ezhilarasan also stated that a guest speaker associated with UNICEF will be attending.

According to the Carolinas Conference website, Delegates are expected to wear western business attire to the conference. This includes wearing suits, blazers, dress shirts, blouses, skirts, slacks and appropriate dress shoes. If a delegate is caught violating the dress code, then they will be given a warning.

The conference will include a lot of speeches, soft skills and lots of research on current issues facing the world today. In addition to vaccine passports, other topics to be debated at this year’s conference including drone warfare, climate change, and combating the threat of cyberattacks to international infrastructure and security.

“It’s like one big play since each member is assigned a country and a topic and students do research based off of a country they are assigned to and are prepared to speak and represent that country throughout that weekend and convince and persuade member states and nations why their plan makes sense and why the rest of the world should sign

on and agree,” Ezhilarasan said.

The goal of each committee is to produce resolutions that address their topics. Delegates are asked not to bring pre-written resolutions and instead are asked to work with their committee to create resolutions during the conference. Awards are also given to delegates, determined by committee chairs, and announced during the closing ceremony. Certificates will be handed out to each delegate during that time, with those attending virtually receiving their certificates through email.

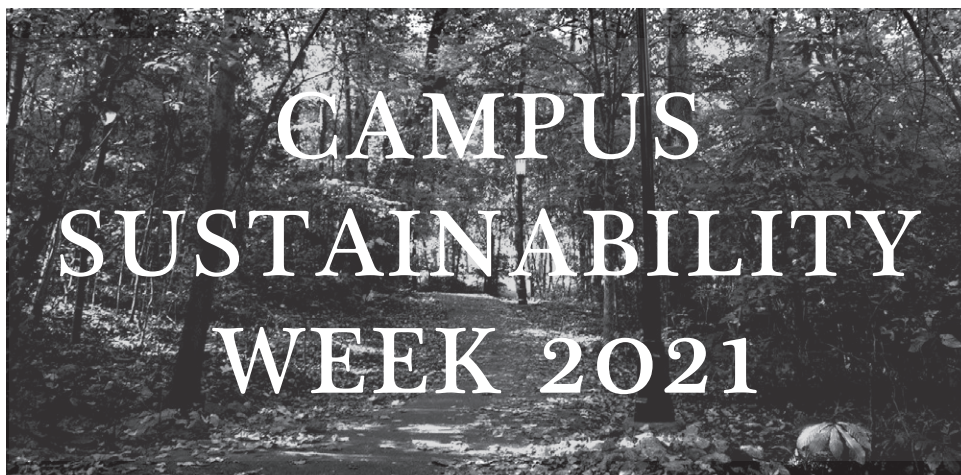
People can register for the conference by joining the MUN Club on campus or register through the organization’s website. The cost of attending the conference, according to the website, is \$25 per student. Unfortunately, payments are only accepted through PayPal this year, including those attending virtually.

To join UNC Charlotte’s MUN, people can sign up through Niner Engage and attend weekly club meetings, usually held Tuesdays at 5:30 p.m. in Friday 141. Delegates are responsible for finding the best solutions in international relations and see how other countries and nations think and view the world.

Photo of Charlotte Model UN Logo courtesy of UNC Charlotte Model United Nations



Photo of Carolinas Conference courtesy of UNC Charlotte Model United Nations



by Madison Dobrzenski
News Editor

Photo of campus nature trail courtesy of
Bethany Ivan

From Oct. 1-Oct. 7, Facilities Management's Sustainability Office will be holding Campus Sustainability Week 2021. The event includes volunteer opportunities and activities that promote sustainability on campus.

In an interview with the Niner Times, University Sustainability Officer Dr. Mike Lizotte said Campus Sustainability Week started in 2014. "It was one of the first things I tried to organize," said Lizotte. "We belong to a national organization called the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), and they hold a campus sustainability month during October, and campuses decide if they do a day or month or whatever they choose."

Campus Sustainability Week is planned by the Sustainability Office, whereas Earth month in April has a lot more people involved in creating and planning events.

The events include a plant sale, tree planting, a campus cleanup, a conversation with the campus energy manager and a student gathering sponsored by the Charlotte Green initiative.

Lizotte especially likes the tree planting event. "That's my background. I was an ecologist and professor before I did this administrative job. I also garden on the weekends," said Lizotte. This event will take place on Monday, Oct. 4, 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m., near the Motor Sports Building and Lot CRI 3. People can volunteer as individuals or bring a group to help reforest part of campus while gaining service hours. Snacks,

gloves and tools will be provided for volunteers.

Lizotte also likes the campus cleanup event and expects that to be the most popular event this year because of the number of people signing up already. This event will be on Tuesday, Oct. 5, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m., in Belk Plaza. People may volunteer as individuals or bring a group. Snacks, gloves, bags and litter sticks will be provided to volunteers.

The "Meet the Energy Manager" event is new this year. It is a part of "energy efficient day." "What we plan to do is set up a zoom session with our energy manager, our engineer, Jason Burnstein. He got hired a year ago and has made some really big things happen on campus," said Lizotte.

Planning these kinds of events involves a lot of gauging student interest. "The student gathering event has a mission, to see what people need," said Lizotte.

SGA was planning to have a student sustainability summit, but they were unable to nail down a location for Campus Sustainability Week. However, Lizotte said one is still being planned for mid-November.

UNC Charlotte joined the College Sustainability Summit with AASHE in November 2018. She even talked with AASHE about UNC Charlotte's award-winning sustainability programs on campus, student engagement and collaborations with the City of Charlotte.

For more information about Campus Sustainability Week or other events, visit facilities.charlotte.edu/sustainability-office/events.

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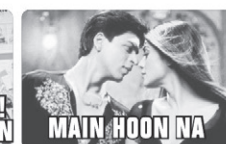
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EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH

APRIL CARTE

April Carte, Editor in Chief of the Niner Times, is the September Employee of the Month. April worked with her editorial and design teams to produce the New Student Guide and Welcome Back issue during summer and August. Since becoming editor, she's built her new staff from the ground up, held training and regular meetings. Congratulations to April on a job well done!

GLOBAL TIES

Women's Soccer Malina Pardo looks to leave legacy as a member of the Puerto Rican National team

by Juwan Watson
Intern

Globe graphic
courtesy of Canva



Charlotte women's soccer midfielder Malina Pardo represented Puerto Rico in international soccer play. Pardo is making waves on the collegiate and national levels by playing the game that she loves.

Pardo hails from Raleigh, North Carolina, where she first started playing sports. At a young age, she played multiple sports, but her love for soccer emerged as she got older. Pardo credits her parents for getting her involved with soccer at an early age.

"I started playing soccer at the age of four, my parents signed me up for rec league and I loved it and kept playing. Then I was also a competitive gymnast as well as a soccer player when I was younger until I got to the point when I had to choose one sport, so it was soccer," said Pardo.

"Playing for Puerto Rico has been something so special and important to me. It's just a huge honor to be able to put on that jersey and represent the island playing soccer," - Pardo

Pardo had a successful high school career at Leesville Road. She received multiple honors over her four years and started her college career at UNC Wilmington. After

two seasons with the Seahawks, Pardo transferred to Charlotte and is in her first season as a 49er. She strives to be great on and off the field as she continues her playing career.

Head Coach John Cullen has been instrumental in helping to elevate her game to the next level. Pardo is excited for what is to come for the team as well as herself. With Cullen by her side, she looks to continue to accomplish great things after a stellar season so far.

"I just like Cullen's coaching style, and I think it fits me better as a player and will help me achieve at the next level," said Pardo.

On the international level, Pardo has been making waves and turning heads. She represents the Puerto Rican women's international team and has four international appearances, including three starts with the team. Pardo has many fond memories, but two specifically stand out to her.

"My favorite moment was scoring my first international goal in the U-20 World Cup Qualifiers against Trinidad & Tobago," said Pardo. "It was an equalizer that tied up the game, which ended up going to penalties. Then my other moment was getting my first start with the senior team that was pretty special."

Pardo, born in the United States, had multiple reasons for choosing to play for Puerto Rico. Her father is Puerto Rican, and her grandmother still lives there. She feels great pride in playing for the country

that is such a big part of her.

"My father is Puerto Rican, and my Grandmother still lives in Puerto Rico," said Pardo. "I had spent full summers in Puerto Rico, and the culture has always been a big part of my life, and ever since I was little, it has always been a dream for me to represent Puerto Rico."

Having the chance to embrace her culture and heritage has been something that has stayed with her. It is an honor to put on the jersey of the country that means so much to her.

"Playing for Puerto Rico has been something so special and important to me. It's just a huge honor to be able to put on that jersey and represent the island playing soccer," said Pardo.

Playing on the college and international level has been vastly different, but it's a challenge nonetheless. Pardo doesn't shy away from the competition and continues to fight through the obstacles that she may face. She takes lessons from these challenges into her everyday life to better herself as a person and player.

"I most definitely feel like it has a huge impact on my game," said Pardo. "It has made me a better player by pushing me, and being able to play against the best of the best is a great experience."

Ultimately, Pardo has many goals for herself, both on and off



Photo of Charlotte's Malina Pardo
courtesy of Emily Yellin/ Charlotte Athletics

FINDING A GROOVE

Heading into the heart of the season, Charlotte men's soccer looks for a rhythm

by Bradley Cole
Sports Editor

Photo of Charlotte soccer player Yang Scofano
by Chris Crews

Charlotte's men's soccer team entered the most important part of their season: conference play.

After going 5-2 against non-conference teams, the 49ers look to win key conference games to help their resume come NCAA tournament time. The non-conference portion of the season saw Charlotte have its highs and lows as they were shut out twice. However, the 49ers outscored their opponents in wins by 16-5, with three goals coming in a thrilling come-from-behind victory against Seattle on Sep. 2.

"No doubt we battled hard during the non-conference schedule," said Charlotte head coach Kevin Langan. "We earned lots of lessons. We talk about earning experiences, not learning from them."

Learning from experiences is something Langan's team did quite well, as they followed up losses with wins early in the season. When the 49ers lost their first game this season at Maryland 0-1, Charlotte won two straight. And when VCU shut them out 0-2, the 49ers won their next four games.

"You can go through all the games and every individual event and we took a lot from each game," said Langan. "Not just the games we lost, also the games we won."

In October, Charlotte will face its stiffest competition with two nationally-ranked opponents in Marshall (5) and Kentucky (10) as of Oct. 2. The 49ers recently played at the 21st-ranked team in the country

in Florida International and dropped the contest, 0-4.

Even though the tough part of the season is right on the horizon, Langan thinks his team is prepared after the

"The non-conference schedule has really set us up nicely for the real challenges of the conference," he said.

Every year in Conference USA (C-USA), there are three to four ranked teams, along with teams that are always right outside of the national poll. Marshall, who the 49ers play on Oct. 23, won last year's College Cup.

Even with the loss on the road, Charlotte still sits fourth in the Conference USA standings.

To get back in the right groove, Charlotte has plenty of options to look to for success. Redshirt senior Joe Brito has been a reliable weapon for the 49ers. This season, he currently has four goals, with two of those coming in one game against Georgia Southern. Brito has 13 points overall this season.

Leading the team isn't something new for Brito, who has been a key piece for Charlotte the last couple of seasons.

"I try to, with my personality type, lead by example, do the right thing at all times, so the young players see what I do and learn from that," said Brito.

Brito thinks his team adjusted to a new style of play this year, which will help in the heart of the season.

"We had a good amount of non-conference games to figure the style of play we're playing and

just come together as a team," said Brito. "Hopefully, we can take what we learned and apply to conference and win it this year."

Not only has the play of Brito helped the 49ers' record, but he has been a big asset for Langan throughout the years.

"Joe leads by example. I call him the silent assassin. He doesn't say much, but his play is so deadly," said Langan. "His bravery, how he gets on ball. Joe's experience is real...we are going to lean on him."

On the other end of the spectrum, the 49ers have a loud but effective voice on the field in Kameron Lacey. The forward/midfielder has been a vocal player in practice and on the field.

"Kameron's a great player," said Langan. "He has that bravery that Joe has...he is an incredible character for us in the game. And off the field, every day, he is the loudest on the team. He's a jokester, he's happy and he is a wonderful positive energy giver to the team."

There have only been three games this year where Lacey hasn't contributed any points for the 49ers and has 12 points thus far, including leading the team with five goals. He had three goals combined in his first two seasons. The junior has 12 shots on goal in 2021, which also leads the team.

"It wouldn't be possible without our team. We might have the points, but I feel like the team has helped us and led us to those goals," said Lacey of a leader of the team, along with Brito. "We all established

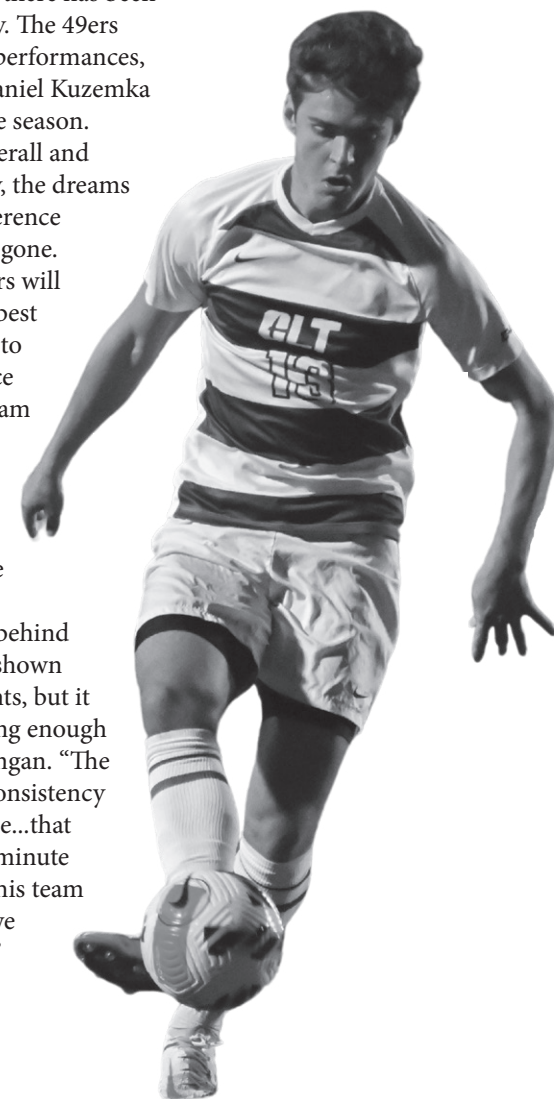
goals at the start of the season, and I feel like we are starting to get the buttons clicking."

As a whole, Charlotte has found a way to spread the ball around when it comes to the offense. Seven different players have scored. Preston Popp (2 goals) and Jonathan Nyandjo (2 goals) have been huge for the 49er offense. Most importantly, there has been success defensively. The 49ers have two shutout performances, and goalkeeper Daniel Kuzemka has 33 saves on the season.

Sitting at 6-3 overall and 1-1 in C-USA play, the dreams of winning a conference championship are gone. Although, the 49ers will have to play their best soccer in October to turn the conference championship dream into a reality.

"I think this team has shown long spells in almost every game of how well we set up how press, get behind the ball...we have shown wonderful moments, but it just hasn't been long enough in games," said Langan. "The challenge is that consistency from game to game...that consistency from minute to minute. What this team does have is that we are very dynamic."

**Charlotte hosts
Old Dominion on
Oct. 9 at 7 p.m.**



CLOSE CALLS

49ers fall 24-14 to the Fighting Illinois after tough breaks

by Cameron Williams
Staff Writer

Photo courtesy of
Charlotte Athletics/Sam Roberts

The Charlotte 49ers football team lost a tough battle to Illinois by a score of 24-14 on Saturday, Oct. 2 at Illinois. It was a game that was determined by the ground game in large part as the Fighting Illini were able to control, not only the time of possession but the run game as well.

“Disappointed. I fully expected to win the game when we came into it. I believe we had plenty of opportunities and we didn’t get it done,” said head coach Will Healy. “Any time we lose a football game around here it should be disappointing. Am I concerned about this football team? Absolutely not. I’m ridiculously proud of them. Extremely resilient, competitive, talented football team. We just haven’t played our best football, yet.”

First Half

After the 49ers won the coin toss, they elected to defer to the second half granting the Fighting Illini the ball to start the game. The 49ers accomplished their first goal by not letting Illinois into the endzone and only giving up a field goal.

After hard-fought runs by Shadrick Byrd and Calvin Camp on the 49ers’ first drive, it was a 22-yard strike from Chris Reynolds to Victor Tucker for the first 49er score of the game. The 49ers would hold Illinois on the Fighting Illini’s next drive forcing a punt, yet it returned fruitless for the 49ers after a turnover on one play after a completion over the middle to Grant DuBose. DuBose, after the reception, went to make a move on the Illini defender and in the process, the ball was knocked free from his control.

It would remain a bit of a defensive-oriented first quarter and remain that way for the first portion of the second quarter. It was not until 2:52 remaining in the half when Illinois quarterback Brandon Peters found Daniel Baker for the 10-yard score putting them up 10-7.

However, the 49ers had a quick answer. It only took six plays for Reynolds to find receiver Elijah Spencer in the

endzone for a 49er touchdown. After a Jonathan Cruz point-after conversion, this made the score 14-10, and the teams would head to halftime after the remaining seconds ticked off the clock.

Second Half

This half was, in large part, dominated by the Fighting Illini. The glaring turning point is when Cruz had a 29-yard field goal attempt to knot the game at 17 apiece, yet pushed it right. On the Fighting Illini’s next possession, it only took one play for them to go 80 yards and find themselves in the endzone. Running back Chase Brown for the Fighting Illini found a gap and took it the distance. Brown would end up with 257 yards on the ground in the game.

“Chase (Brown) could catch the ball out of the backfield, he could outrun you,” head coach Will Healy said after the game. “He is very physical and runs with great pad level.”

There would not be any more scores the rest of the game, and Illinois was able to continue to chip away at the clock.

“They killed us in time of possession,” Healy added. It is a game that was

physical from the opening kickoff and Healy will look to rally his guys for the short week they have upcoming.

Charlotte’s fifth-year quarterback Chris Reynolds is optimistic that the team will use this loss to motivate the team. With the team getting into the depth of the conference season, the 49ers put the loss behind them.

“If we let it bother us, this loss can hurt us for the rest of the year,” said Reynolds. “No matter if it is a win or a loss, you can’t be too high for too low. It’s the same process we wake up in the morning and move on.”

Looking Ahead

The 49ers have a short week of preparation as they will travel to Florida International to face the Panthers on Friday, Oct. 8 at 7 p.m. This game will be televised on the CBS Sports Network. The 49ers will look to cash in on their opportunities against the Panthers.

“We have a lot in front of us,” said Reynolds. “We have a lot of opportunities in front of us, and we have to cash in on them by continuing to work on them.”



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GERRYMANDERED JIGSAW PUZZLE

Are North Carolina politicians for or against the people?

by Ashley Conde
Staff Writer

Graphic of North Carolina congressional
districts by Zoya Zalevskiy

Madison Cawthorn, a Republican, is the youngest member elected to Congress since Jed Johnson Jr. in 1964. So far in this junior congressman's career, he brought a knife to a school board meeting, proudly embraced the big lie about the 2020 election being stolen and conditioned his voters to believe that political violence is justified in the name of God. While Cawthorn aspires to become the next Republican caricature for future Saturday Night Live skits, many North Carolinians continue to wonder how he was ever elected.

Without a doubt, the answer for Cawthorn's victory exists within our state's history. North Carolina, the tar-heel state, has a long history of troubled coexistence between progressives and conservatives. On April 12, 1776, our state became the first to declare independence from Great Britain. Once called "the best poor man's country," North Carolina was home to hard-working farmers and laborers as well as professionals in the research triangle.

However, in 1861, North Carolina followed South Carolina's lead and became one of 11 slave-holding states to secede from the union, which kickstarted the Civil War. After reconstruction ended, the state slid back into repression by restoring its antebellum racial hierarchy. But, progress marched forward despite the return of Jim Crow.

Our state's political history includes a roster of great leaders such as Charles Aycock, the governor who focused on

improving public education, Cameron Morrison, the "good roads governor" who resurfaced thousands of miles of state roads and William Kerr Scott, who fought for the common man.

However, despite their accomplishments, our state's history remains a political paradox of progressivism and race-based classism. While Aycock and Morrison improved public services, they also opposed civil rights and women's suffrage. On the other hand, Scott appointed the state's first female superior court judge and assigned the first African American to the state board of education. Altogether, these leaders represent the political contradictions exhibited within North Carolina.

Throughout our state's 400-year history, conservatives actively prevented oppressed citizens from voicing their opinions. Although previous methods included voter intimidation, current ones involve improperly drawn districts—also known as gerrymandering. Gerrymandering silences Black people's, women's, poor whites' and other minority's votes. Republicans have redrawn maps and passed stringent voting laws that many have called out for being blatantly unfair in the past decade. According to the Washington Post, one map was highlighted for its "surgical precision" of targeting Black voters.

Cawthorn's election is an example of extreme partisan gerrymandering that has created non-competitive districts.

Republicans won the 11th District, once a swing seat, by drawing a line straight through the largest city in western North Carolina. Asheville, the hippy city of vegans and breweries, was split to dilute the Democratic vote in two districts by attaching half of the city with a large section of conservative rural towns. While this specific map was ultimately blocked from being used in the 2020 election, gerrymandering has set an alarming precedent for future elections.

Many North Carolina voters continue to feel unheard. Republicans, who no longer represent a majority of the state, continue to push against popular change. Gerrymandering is a shameful practice but is nothing new in North Carolina. However, not to say that North Carolina could be the next forever blue state, but if representatives drew districts fairly and proportionally, there could be much pride in knowing that North Carolina is (at the very least) upholding democracy.

Whether you are conservative, liberal or in between, nobody should feel embarrassed when their state comes up in the national conversation. Authentic representation in our state's politics starts by keeping up to date with political news and advocating for yourself and others by calling your representatives. If every voter in North Carolina felt empowered to participate in our state politics, our state would be on the right track toward a true democracy.

INTERVIEWING: Courtney Coyle

Mental health industry shift and tips for college students

by Emily Kottak
Arts & Culture Editor

Photo of Courtney Coyle
Courtesy of Courtney Coyle

We often hear that mental health is just as important as physical health, but how can we ensure it becomes a priority for college students, especially during a pandemic? Courtney Coyle, a licensed clinical social worker, attended UNC Chapel Hill for undergrad and came to UNC Charlotte for graduate school. Coyle has a background of working with gang affiliations and the mentality behind it, military families, human trafficking, and child welfare systems and how these overlap.

"The pandemic did a couple of really great things, including making people look at mental health differently," said Coyle. "People began looking at therapy as a tool versus seeing someone as being sick or being ashamed of mental struggles. Relationships also became stronger and more meaningful during this time."

Coyle is currently located in Greensboro, but many of her clients are now meeting with her virtually. Virtual and telehealth appointments are still how most clients are meeting with their counselors due to the pandemic. While some may be turned off to this virtual approach, it is better to meet with someone in this format as opposed to not meeting at all with the given circumstances.

Though Coyle has worked with many populations and different areas of focus throughout the years, much of her work focus shifted during the pandemic.

"I started with doing bigger systematic things, but when Covid hit, I realized I could do a lot more one-on-one with

people than trying to do big global changes because the world was so catastrophic at that time," said Coyle. "I really enjoy being able to support people one-on-one."

Coyle greatly enjoyed her UNC Charlotte experience, commenting on the program, the people, professors, much self-awareness and self-exploration. The latter is particularly important with the type of profession Coyle is in. Knowing yourself before trying to know and help others is very important and helpful. UNC Charlotte's program has a high focus on this so that when graduates go out



into the field, they can feel good about themselves and confident in helping others.

For Coyle, a typical day consists of waking up and working out to clear her mind and then either heading to the office or staying home. She typically has a telehealth day and then an in-office day and generally has around eight to nine clients per day but says there is a line of clients waiting.

"There's a lot more therapy that needs to be happening," said Coyle. "There's a shortage of therapists right now, so people can't get in or there's no time, so right now it is a very quick-moving field, and you are turning people in and out quickly because there is a line of people ready to get therapy."

Coyle generally specializes in working with young adults. Many of these clients are going through significant transitions such as high school to college or college to young adulthood.

"Those transitions have been super hard for people during Covid," Coyle said. "Right now, that particular population is seeking out therapy. I think therapy is less stigmatized among the younger people, but also it's just such a whirlwind. People have worked so hard, and now they feel like they don't know how to handle it, how to control it or even what to do because everything is so unpredictable."

There has been a lot of disappointment during this time as many people have had such high expectations for college or their jobs, and having it not be

everything they wished and hoped for can be devastating. Coyle mentioned, for example, how people who were seniors were excited but had everything taken away, and there is a lot of sadness surrounding that and the expectations.

As college students, many of us have experienced all kinds of emotions, hardships, disappointments and struggles in general within the past year with the pandemic and transition. With experience working with many people in this age range, Coyle has some suggestions.

"I think the thing about college right now is that everyone is in the unknown," Coyle said. "Don't focus on missing something or doing something because everyone is in this standstill and this space together. You don't have to be the one to try and figure it out. So don't stress about something that isn't even available yet."

According to Coyle, one in seven relationships have ended during this pandemic, so leaning into friends and social engagement are also her suggestions. She also emphasizes how helpful mindfulness can be, perhaps through meditation, taking a quick break and focusing on the present moment, yoga, breathing exercises or even reading a book.

The season of life we are in right now is hard, but luckily we have tools and resources to help us. Though times are uncertain, focusing on the present is vital and taking care of our mental health is a priority we must strive for.

SADDLE UP

FOR A ROAD TRIP OUT WEST

Traveling experiences as a college student

by Kelsey Burgess
Intern

Photos of locations visited by Madison Gore in the west
All photos courtesy of Madison Gore

Rising junior, Madison Gore, never lets time slip away from her. Planning one trip after the next, and using up every dime her waitressing job provides, Gore is determined to travel every inch of the world she can.

"I want to see as much as I can, because every place is so different," explains Gore as she talks about how even the northern beaches of North Carolina are on her to-do list, because she is so passionate about exploring new landscapes.

Gore has traveled to Rome, Florence, Capri and London in the past and doesn't plan on stopping there. She has a month-long trip in the near future that she is eagerly awaiting. On her most recent trip, Gore packed her bags and spent ten days out west, where she experienced

some of the most breathtaking places.

To begin her trip, Gore flew out with eagerness and excitement. Gore explained that she spent lots of time in the National Parks, hiking. Altogether, the group hiked 63 miles in ten days!

"Super adventurous, and you definitely have to be young, or in shape. And not need much sleep," says Gore.

During a single day, the group went on a ten mile hike, which seems exhausting to say the least. They ventured through caves, valleys, mountains, and other extravagant landscapes as they admired the beauty of each individual area. During the trip, she spent some time with a guide, but also had the opportunity to go off on her own, which she always took advantage of. The chance to explore solo, or with a close friend, is a chance she would never take for granted. One of the interesting hikes that Gore conquered was called Narrows. Narrows is located at Zion National Park, and consists of half water and half land, making for

beautiful views and a difficult hike.

Although she barely could stand up on the bus ride home, she remarks that the views were worth it all. Making stops in Salt Lake City, Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon, five National Parks, and in Phoenix and

Flagstaff, Arizona, the group stayed on the move. With a packed bus, they didn't waste any time, zipping to each location with cameras in hand.

The group consisted fully of young people traveling in a crew of "solo travelers," trips designed specifically for college students and twenty-somethings that may not have friends/family to travel with, but are not comfortable with traveling alone. This opportunity provided by EF Tours is a great way to meet new people that may have similar interests, while feeling safe and secure. It also gives parents some peace of mind, which is another headache relief. Having the opportunity to travel all day with a guide, helps travelers overcome the small barriers that may be a big deal when traveling alone in an unknown area. The beauty of EF Tours, is that they also allow travelers to explore on their own at certain times and places so that the attendees can really delve into an area or event that interests them!

Don't worry, this group did more than just see beautiful views, they filled their stomachs with scrumptious foods. Gore described many different delicious Mexican restaurants, but couldn't leave out the trip to Gordon Ramsey's Steakhouse, in Las Vegas. hilariously, she described that most of her spending money could've been used at a single trip to the Ramsey Steakhouse. Although, some time later, she is still reminiscing about the spicy Mexican food that caressed her mouth throughout the trip. She is studying Culinary Arts and has a divine love for foods of all kinds.

Gore traveled with EF Tours, and 17 other individuals eager to see the beauty of the western United States. Gore said she recommends this trip 100 times again, and she felt as though for the price, \$2,100, she got her money's worth. While saving up the money may be a tough challenge for college students, anything is possible

with hard work and dedication to obtain memories that last a lifetime. Gore works as a Front of House Manager at only 20 years old, is enrolled in a full semester of college, purchased her own car, and still manages to throw money into her savings account in order to pay off her trips in full. Gore has two more trips planned in the upcoming year, but is steadfast in her love for traveling the world. She recently became an ambassador for EF Tours, confident that her passion for travel will never be quenched. Stay tuned, to see where she goes next! Here is a hint, it is in Europe!

