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disheartened

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

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

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Events to watch for on campus

Softball vs East Carolina
March 28, 6 P.M.
Sue M. Daughtridge Stadium

Wellbeing Block Party
April 2, 11 A.M. - 2 P.M.
CHHS/COED Plaza

Earth Day Festival
April 3, 10 A.M. - 2 P.M.
Belk Plaza

Gospel Choir
March 31, 7:30 P.M.
Rowe Recital Hall

Adjusting to American Culture:
Potluck
April 2, 4:30 - 6:30 P.M.
Atkins 146

10th Annual Viet Night
April 6, 5 - 10 P.M.
Union 340

From the UNC Charlotte police logs (3/9 - 3/20)

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

The following are descriptions of some incidents in the UNC Charlotte campus police logs from March 9-20.

March 16

Larceny of Motor Vehicle

A student reported his vehicle had been stolen and located in Pineville, with the window and ignition damaged. The vehicle had been stolen from Lot 25 on March 15. The theft is currently under investigation.

March 14

Noise disturbance

Dispatch received a call in regard to a loud "boom" heard outside of Belk Hall. Officers responded but were unable to identify any problems in the area.

March 9

Assisting other agency

An officer assisted in investigating a bomb threat made on social media to a high school. No real threat was found to campus or the high school.

Defining diversity, equity and inclusion

Clare Grealey | Copy Editor

Diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI, is a set of frameworks and ideals that are meant to promote a more inclusive and level playing field in the workforce and public sphere. These ideals include policies that companies and institutions employ to prevent discrimination, notably in hiring, retaining and promoting individuals within the workforce.

DEI practices are not a new phenomenon. Veterans of the Civil War were given preferential treatment in hiring practices, along with widows of deceased soldiers. This continued into the 1920s and 1940s. DEI initiatives can also be seen in non-discrimination laws surrounding hiring

practices throughout history, such as the recently repealed Executive Order 11246, which required all government employers to "hire without regard to race, religion and national origin."

However, DEI initiatives are not solely present in the federal government. Prior to the spring of 2024, multiple offices existed here on UNC Charlotte's campus, such as the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, which was established shortly after the arrival of Chancellor Sharon L. Gaber in 2020, and the Office of Identity, Equity and Engagement in the fall of 2018. The creation of these offices fostered a sense of community and allowed for Charlotte's widely diverse student body to be

welcomed and celebrated.

Following a May 2024 vote from the UNC System's Board of Governors to eliminate DEI initiatives, these offices and others were quickly shuttered, and their employees moved elsewhere.

In 2025, these rollbacks continue at the federal and university levels, with the new presidential administration handing down executive orders requiring the complete removal of DEI programs nationwide and threats to cut funding. At Charlotte, DEI-related research has been paused or cut entirely, classes regarding DEI topics have been cut from graduation requirements and University diversity celebrations have been halted.

A timeline of DEI changes at UNC Charlotte

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

APRIL 25, 2024

STUDENTS AND STAFF PROTEST DEI CUTS AT UNC CHARLOTTE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

After the UNC System Board of Governors proposed the policy change that would eventually dismantle UNC System institution's DEI programming, UNC Charlotte students and faculty protested during the April 25, 2024, Charlotte Board of Trustees meeting to advocate for DEI programs on campus.

Despite the protests of over 50 people, the Trustees did not discuss or reference the policy change during the meeting.

"DEI is integrated into every single thing [at UNC Charlotte]," one student protestor told the Niner Times during the meeting. "It's in every syllabus, every department, every person."

MAY 23, 2024

UNC SYSTEM BOARD OF GOVERNORS PASS POLICY REPEALING DEI SYSTEM-WIDE

In a 21-2 vote that took under two minutes, the UNC System Board of Governors replaced the existing DEI policy with a new policy emphasizing neutrality and effectively ordering the closure or realignment of campus DEI departments and programs.

The revised DEI policy was originally proposed at the April 17 Board of Governors University Governance Committee meeting, a subset of the Board of Governors. The University Governance Committee unanimously passed the motion in less than five minutes.

At the Raleigh meeting, roughly 35 protestors from various UNC System institutions were present to advocate for DEI and Palestine.

"We are here to say that students do not stand for this policy repeal," said UNC Chapel-Hill student protestor Samuel Scarborough. "We will not allow this board to have peace until our peace is here."

AUG. 8, 2024

UNC CHARLOTTE ANNOUNCES MAJOR CHANGES TO DEI OFFICES AND PROGRAMS

To comply with the policy passed at the May 23 Board of Governors meeting, Charlotte closed its Identity, Equity and Engagement offices, Office of Diversity and Inclusion offices and the Office of Academic Diversity and Inclusion.

Faculty and staff in these departments were either reassigned to other roles on campus or helped to find employment elsewhere by the University.

Brandon Wolfe, Charlotte's associate vice chancellor for diversity and inclusion and chief diversity officer, was reassigned as executive director for campus and alumni group connections as his former position was eliminated.

Ten total staff members were reassigned due to the changes, as their positions were eliminated.

Many services or offerings held under offices closed were realigned to comply with the policy and moved under an expanded Leadership & Community Engagement office.

JAN. 29, 2025

DEI-RELATED ORDER FOR FEDERAL FUNDING FREEZE PROMPTS MESSAGE FROM CHANCELLOR GABER

Following an executive memorandum requiring all federal funding to halt for agencies to determine if there was compliance with President Donald Trump's order to eliminate DEI from federal agencies caused nationwide panic, UNC Charlotte Chancellor Sharon L. Gaber quelled concerns with a message to the campus community.

With the executive memo rescinded just days after its release, Gaber's message told students that the University would "monitor this situation closely, and the Division of Research will provide additional updates to affected faculty, staff and students."

A later executive order was passed aiming to end "radical wasteful government DEI programs," threatening an end to federal funding for federal agencies that did not comply.

At Charlotte, student research related to DEI is paused, terminated or refocused to comply with the order. Several federal grants previously sent to these projects were paused or stopped.

FEB. 5, 2025

UNC SYSTEM ORDERS END TO DEI COURSE REQUIREMENTS, WARNING OF FEDERAL FUNDING RISKS

A UNC System memorandum ordered all public system universities to eliminate DEI course credit requirements or risk losing federal funding.

The order suspends all DEI-related general education and major-specific course requirements but does not impact course content. Students in affected spring 2025 courses are allowed to remain enrolled in the courses, though these courses were converted into general education credits. No graduations will be delayed due to the policy and its effects.

Charlotte has yet to announce how it will implement these changes. Further updates are expected as universities comply with the order.

"The University assessed its general education course requirements to ensure they complied with the directive," reads Charlotte's section on its fact sheet for legal and policy changes. "Academic Affairs is currently examining degree-specific mandatory DEI course requirements."

DEI rollbacks across NC universities

Niner Times Editorial Board

On Aug. 8, 2024, DEI programming and offices at UNC Charlotte were dismantled in compliance with policy passed by the UNC System Board of Governors. These changes occurred across the UNC System, meaning Charlotte was not the only school affected; all 17 institutions within the UNC System were impacted.

These diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs and offices helped support the diverse student populations at UNC System institutions.

In compliance with a Feb. 5 memorandum from the Board of Governors, UNC institutions now must suspend all general education courses related to DEI as a graduation requirement or risk losing federal funding.

Duke University is not a UNC System institution and is not subject to the same policies that schools within the UNC System are.

Still, Duke receives federal funding and can risk losing that funding if they do not comply with executive orders that prohibit DEI practices. This necessitates changes in Duke's DEI programming.

With North Carolina universities' DEI offerings again under fire, the following is a look at changes across the state's major campuses.

Relocated funds

UNC Charlotte: UNC Charlotte has shifted \$1,008,172.67 to broader 'student success' initiatives, with focus on enhancing programs that promote academic achievement and student engagement across all demographics.

UNC-Chapel Hill: A total of \$5.3 million in funds was reallocated or redirected, with \$3 million going to various campus departments. An additional \$2.3 million allocated initially for DEI services was redirected to public safety ini-

tiatives.

NC State University: NC State reported a \$4.9 million shift in fund to other campus initiatives. With a majority of NC State's programs and positions being realigned, the bulk of this \$4.9 million has remained in DEI-adjacent programs.

UNC Wilmington: UNCW reported its DEI-related cuts total to be over \$1 million. \$760,000 was allocated to "needs-based" financial aid. \$397,000 was directed to Student Engagement, Retention and Enrollment (SEER).

Duke University: Duke University is preparing for significant funding cuts, primarily due to potential reductions in National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants, which are being reduced due to federal DEI cuts. These cuts could cost the University an estimated \$194 million and may have significant effect on research funding.

Program changes

UNC Charlotte: UNC Charlotte has closed three key DEI-related offices: the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the Office of Identity, Equity and Engagement and the Office of Academic Diversity and Inclusion.

UNC-Chapel Hill: The University Diversity and Inclusion Office was eliminated. Project Uplift, a program aimed at introducing high school students to the University, was moved under the Office of Carolina Higher Education Opportunity Programs.

NC State University: The Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity (OIED) was renamed to the Office of Equal Opportunity. Several programs and student centers housed under OIED were relocated to the Division of Academic and Student Affairs to align with policy.

UNC Wilmington: The Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion (OIDI) was shuttered,

eliminating the current structure that oversees diversity and inclusion initiatives on campus. Cultural centers previously managed under OIDI were moved to the Division of Student Affairs.

Duke: Duke altered the Reginaldo Howard Memorial Scholars Program, which had provided full-ride merit scholarships to select Black students but now is open to all undergraduate students, regardless of race.

Curriculum changes

UNC Charlotte: UNC Charlotte's general education courses remain unaffected but will no longer be required to graduate if they pertain to DEI. With DEI cuts ongoing, curriculum is expected to undergo further change, particularly in high risk DEI-related academic departments.

UNC-Chapel Hill: All general education requirements for graduation related to DEI have been suspended. These suspensions will not delay any graduations across any UNC System institution.

NC State University: The U.S. DEI General Education Program (GEP) requirement has been suspended. Students enrolled in spring 2025 courses with the intent to complete the DEI classes will be given the choice of completing the course and receiving appropriate GEP credit or dropping the course without academic penalty.

UNC Wilmington: Similar to UNC-Chapel Hill general education requirements for graduation related to DEI have been suspended. Any withdrawal shall be deemed a course withdrawal with extenuating circumstances under section 400.1.5 of the UNC Policy Manual, "Regulation Related to Fostering Undergraduate Student Success."

Duke: As they are not within the UNC System, Duke has yet to see changes to curriculum

and is not expected to unless executive orders push them to do so.

Staff impacted

UNC Charlotte: Following the office closures, 10 staff members in DEI offices have been reassigned to other roles within the University. Roles reassigned include the associate vice chancellor for diversity and inclusion and director of the office of identity, equity and engagement.

UNC Chapel-Hill: The DEI Fellowship Program was eliminated, directly affecting fellows. UNC-Chapel Hill's vice provost for equity and inclusion transitioned to a role in the Office of the Provost. While staff realignments were minimal, several student counselors in Project Uplift resigned in protest of the changes.

NC State University: Eight positions within DEI departments were eliminated, 29 staff members were relocated to different responsibilities.

UNC Wilmington: The UNCW chief diversity officer position was eliminated, with the individual transitioning to a faculty role. Of the 13 other OIDI employees, four were reassigned to vacant staff positions across campus, one returned to faculty in the Watson College of Education, five joined SEER and three moved to the Office of Campus Life under the Division of Student Affairs. Sixteen total positions were eliminated but as the employees in these positions were relocated, no staff were laid off.

Duke: As of March 23, Duke University has not announced DEI-related staff layoffs. Still, it has implemented a hiring freeze for staff positions in anticipation of federal funding cuts and is reviewing faculty hiring practices, slowing new appointments.

How UNC Charlotte's past DEI closures reshaped campus leadership and funding

Brendan Mullen | Writing Managing Editor

In August 2024, UNC Charlotte closed three campus diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) offices to comply with the new UNC System policy. While the full extent and effect of these changes were unknown in August, now, six months later, in March, clarity on these changes is starting to form.

Alongside these closures, several positions were either eliminated or transitioned, with some affected personnel reassigned to

fill vacancies. Funding initially for salaries, operational expenses and discretionary spending was also redistributed.

Funding

In total, the University redirected \$1,008,172.67 to "student success" initiatives from previous DEI programming.

\$608,134 of that total was redirected from the closed Office of Diversity and In-

clusion (ODI) to salaries for realigned jobs and funding for programs for student success.

Additionally, \$398,038.67 was redirected from the Office of Identity, Equity and Engagement (IEE) to student success and \$2,000 from eliminating programs within the Office of Academic Diversity and Inclusion (ADI).

Top position changes

Of the positions eliminated from these offices, the most notable were associate vice chancellor of diversity and inclusion, chief diversity officer and director of identity, equity and engagement.

According to the UNC Salary Information Database, former Associate Vice Chancellor of Diversity and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer Brandon Wolfe was originally paid a salary of \$182,988 in quarter one of 2024.

After the elimination of his former position, Wolfe moved into a new role as the executive director for campus and alumni group connections with a salary of \$188,478 in quarter four of 2024, according to the same database.

Subsequent to the elimination of IEE, the position of director of the Office of Identity and Equity and Engagement was also removed. IEE's former director, Ysatis Piñero, then transitioned into her new role, filling a vacancy as director of the Office Leadership & Community Engagement (LCE).

In quarter one of 2024, Piñero's salary as director of the Office of Identity and Equity and Engagement was \$90,302. After assuming her new position at LCE, her salary increased to \$93,011.

Role realignments

Alongside these two leadership positions, the University realigned several less prominent leadership roles and salaries to other roles and offices.

Under the IEE, the assistant director for experiential and equity initiatives was realigned to the assistant director of Civic Leadership & Experiential Learning at LCE. The role originally provided programming focused on equity and identity development/intersections. Now, the role acts as a coordinator for experiential learning opportunities and implementor of civic lead-

ership initiatives.

Additionally, the assistant director for sexual and gender diversity was changed to the assistant director of mentoring initiatives for Leadership & Community Engagement. The role was responsible for programming related to gender and sexual diversity and supporting the efforts and experiences of LGBTQ+ students. The adjusted role now administrates and provides leadership for student mentoring programs.

The assistant director of IEE was changed to the program director for mentoring initiatives in Leadership & Community Engagement. The role was once responsible for leading the Student Advising for Freshman Excellence (SAFE) program, overseeing student employment programs, teaching a freshman seminar course and other administrative duties. The position is also now responsible for administrating and leading student mentorship programs.

In the ADI, the director and clinical assistant professor strategically lead the office in academic advising, transition programs and other student counseling and academic services. Now, as the director for retention and graduation and clinical faculty, the role leads University efforts to support student success and graduation rates. Additionally, it works closely with academic colleges and their administrators to provide a seamless approach to student retention using data analytics to drive students to succeed.

Alongside the transition of the ADI director into a new role, the two assistant directors have faced changes as well. One assistant was responsible for marketing, recruitment, implementation and evaluation of impacts on various diversity-related student success programs. The role has since been altered to the assistant director for First Generation Academic Initiatives and works to support first-generation students transitioning into Charlotte.

The other assistant director also oversaw and evaluated programs for students transitioning into Charlotte. Furthermore, the role provided general academic services such as secondary academic advising, academic mentoring, personal and leadership development workshops, and more. The role has maintained its title as assistant director but is now for the University Transition Opportunities Program (UTOP), in which it assists in various administrative work.

Lastly, the associate director of academic diversity and inclusion handled diversity education and curriculum support, integration, support and evaluation before being changed to the senior associate director of first-year transition programs. Under its new title, this job supervises the Student Experience Project staff.



Kahye Duerson/
Niner Times

Charlotte researchers grapple with anxieties amid DEI funding cuts

Brendan Mullen | Writing Managing Editor

With President Donald Trump's executive orders reshaping diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies in public universities, students at Charlotte are left wondering if their graduate or undergraduate research will be affected.

The funding concerns gripping Charlotte's community stem from an executive order signed by Trump aimed at eliminating federal spending on DEI initiatives. The order, signed in early 2025, directs federal agencies, including major research funding groups, to discontinue DEI-related grants and programs.

The University has acknowledged the potential consequences of the orders for student researchers on campus, stating online that "[t]his directive has led some agencies to pause or withdraw funding from DEI-focused research projects."

In light of these acknowledgments and funding cuts becoming a reality, a sense of dread is taking hold among undergraduate and graduate students involved in research on campus.

Charlotte Sophomore and Undergraduate Research Assistant Zihui Qiu has shared her concerns regarding the research she is involved in being cut. Qiu's lab addresses intervention programs for problematic alcohol to bolster a lack of research on the diverse populations these programs serve.

Although Qiu's research is not overtly political, it is funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), a key target of the Trump administration's budget cuts aimed at reducing government spending. Additionally, Qiu's research emphasizes ensuring interventions are effective across diverse populations, potentially linking it to DEI.

With DEI-linked grants facing a heightened risk of termination, the uncertainty surrounding Qiu's lab feels less like speculation and

more like an impending reality.

"We have been existing in a cloud of worry and are emotionally and practically bracing for a future where our NIH grant is canceled as well," said Qiu.

Moreover, Qiu's fears are no longer hypothetical. She has already seen the real-world impacts of these policy shifts.

"[On March 20], our sister lab had their grant canceled," said Qiu. "Years of research—done. The students who worked in that lab are scrambling to find work elsewhere."

The impact of the cuts extends beyond the loss of funding. They are reshaping career paths and derailing academic aspirations.

As Qiu prepares to apply for medical school, she grapples with a growing sense of frustration and fear.

"I feel angry and scared that I am under an administration that is actively making it difficult or even impossible to do the work I want to do," said Qiu.

Graduate student Sophie Tanker demonstrated that undergraduate researchers do not hold these fears alone.

"[A]ny grad student who says they aren't scared is lying, either to you or themselves," said Tanker. "This [executive order] touches all of us, and if it hasn't touched them already, it will."

Tanker has completed her graduate research requirements and has since pivoted to a different field of work as a registered patent agent. The shift ap-

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"I feel angry and scared that I am under an administration that is actively making it difficult or even impossible to do the work I want to do."

- Zihui Qiu, undergraduate research assistant

pears to have been the right one for Tanker, especially as research possibilities grow more and more uncertain; however, she still worries about the impacts of potential grant cuts on her peers.

"I know in my soul I'm glad that I'm getting out now," said Tanker. "My heart is with my friends and colleagues who are in this for the long haul. They're troopers."

In light of the widespread panic students are experiencing, Charlotte's Division of Research has released a statement on its website acknowledging student feelings as it continues to assess the evolving situation.

"The Division

of Research continues to monitor information as it becomes available through several reliable channels, including advocacy organizations, partner institutions, and guidance from agencies(...) We deeply understand that uncertainty and new guidance may cause stress and are committed to supporting our research community for stability across our programs."

Updates regarding the effects of executive actions on campus research will be posted on the Division of Research's website or sent to Charlotte community members via email.



Niner Times File



Ava Weaver/Niner Times & Courtesy of UNC Charlotte

Global Gateways program faces uncertainty pending UNC System compliance with federal policy

Wes Packham | Asst. Arts & Culture Editor

As a result of President Donald Trump's executive orders seeking to eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), many universities throughout the country have dialed back their programs offering DEI services.

While course and degree requirements have been most immediately affected, with the UNC System suspending required DEI courses, cultural residential communities, a vital part of the multicultural community at many universities, have also been discontinued at several universities.

The Global Gateways living community is one such program at UNC Charlotte. Global Gateways seeks to connect students from both international and domestic backgrounds to share and diversify each student's cultural understanding.

Global Gateways was first established in 2013 and originally brought together 28 female students from the USA and other countries. Now a co-ed program, it invites 16 students each semester to live together in Witherspoon Hall, encouraging cultural bonding and learning throughout the academic year.

Three universities have discontinued similar living-learning programs on their campuses.

The University of Florida has removed the ability to sign up for any of its non-academic

learning communities for fall 2025, including communities dedicated to international students. The University of Iowa has confirmed that it will cease the operations of three communities oriented toward LGBTQ+, Latino and Black students.

Notably, North Carolina State University will shut down two culture-based residence halls dedicated to Native American and Black students. As a part of the UNC System, this change could influence other universities within North Carolina to follow suit.

What could this mean for UNC Charlotte's Global Gateways Program?

It is unclear whether the program will be discontinued. Coordinator for the Office of Global Education and Engagement Jillian Grant explains that Global Gateways may not fall under the recently imposed federal restrictions.

"I know a lot of those communities that have been canceled, it seems like, are serving a specific population, which is what the problem [the Trump administration] had with them. It is an exclusive group that was [being served]. Global Gateways, to my knowledge, should be fine. The whole purpose [is that it] is for everyone. It's not exclusive in any way," said Grant.

Federal legislation is not the only factor, how-

ever. Pressure to eliminate DEI may push universities to close programs independent of exact policy for fear of losing federal funding.

The Trump administration claims that schools that implement these living-learning facilities may be in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibiting discrimination based on race, color and national origin in programs receiving federal financial assistance.

As a public institution, UNC Charlotte receives federal funding from the government, thus falling under Title VI. It is up to interpretation whether living-learning communities qualify as discrimination based on national origin.

The University of Iowa has reinterpreted its existing diversity programs into unofficial groups, allowing continued operation while being compliant with Iowa State Legislation.

This indicates that these programs may still be able to exist, but they may operate differently.

Despite the uncertainty of elimination, Grant hopes that the University will continue to support international students on campus while advocating for the continued existence of the program herself.

"Even if it is a more hands-off approach than living with each other, I think we can still foster an environment that can promote the great

learning and intercultural exchange that students get from this," said Grant.

Students say they benefited greatly from participating in Global Gateways.

Fourth-year Hannah Stroup has been a part of Global Gateways for two years, citing how she has benefited from the program and made lifelong friendships through its opportunities.

Although she originally wanted to study abroad to diversify her understanding of global culture, she did not want to leave campus culture behind. Global Gateways provides a happy medium for students like her.

From her positive experiences within the program, Stroup hopes that students will be able to participate for years to come.

"I think it would be really horrible and set a really bad trend if school officials just started to make decisions outside of [federal] policy, or if they [went] the extra mile to harm international students and American students who care about making connections," said Stroup.

The exact outcome of the situation is pending both federal and state legislation as well as the decision of the UNC System and UNC Charlotte's senior leadership.



Student organizations collaborate to serve campus communities after DEI's dissolvement

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

With DEI programming disappearing on campus, students have lost safe spaces, support and resources that once drove their success at UNC Charlotte.

Now, six months after the changes that removed that programming, Charlotte's student organizations have stepped up to fill the gap those programs once filled.

Yet, with Charlotte's Identity, Equity and Engagement offices (IEE), Office of Diversity and Inclusion and Office of Academic Diversity and Inclusion all officially shuttered on Aug. 8, student orgs have been faced with increasing their offerings without the support to do so that they previously had from those offices.

One organization that was never there to receive the support of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programming on campus but still determined to replace it is Latinos for Action, Change & Empowerment or 'LACE.'

LACE was founded at the start of the spring 2025 semester in response to DEI's removal.

The organization's founder and co-president, Amanda Valle, a first-year student at Charlotte, said the lack of DEI on campus and ongoing cuts

nationwide acted as her wake-up call to start LACE.

"Attacks on DEI are not just about cutting funding—they are about silencing marginalized communities," said Valle. "At LACE, we see this as a call to action. If institutions won't prioritize our needs, we will find ways to support each other."

The new organization offers many of the services now-dismantled campus DEI offices provided, such as educational resources, scholarship guidance and a safe space for Latino students.

As the University does not run the organization, LACE has more leeway in what services and support it can offer and aims to equip its members with tools to advocate for others.

In the organization's first-ever meeting on Feb. 5, they held an informational session discussing how to navigate encounters with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and how to support the undocumented community amid immigration crackdowns.

On March 18, LACE collaborated with La Unidad Latina Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity Inc., Lambda Theta Phi Fraternity Inc. and Unity

in Diversity at Charlotte to hold their 'Fiesta de Feria' event. The event was held to promote the Latin community on campus and create a space for attendees to experience Latin culture.

With DEI's removal, cultural events like these hosted by multiple student organizations are happening more and more as student orgs work together to serve their communities.

Unity in Diversity at UNC Charlotte is a student organization that was built to offer a service that DEI programming was made to provide; the organization aims to connect all students from all backgrounds to experience each others' cultures and come together.

"I believe everyone should belong and have the right to advocate for their representation without an issue," said Ivy Jenkins, social media coordinator for Unity in Diversity at Charlotte and first-year Charlotte student. "Removing DEI initiatives creates less support for underrepresented students and faculty in terms of resources, mentoring and advocacy."

Uniform with LACE's push to collaborate to provide community and support is Charlotte's Asian Student Association (ASA).

For ASA's largest annual event, 'Hello Asia,' the organization collaborated with Charlotte's Korean-American Student Association (KASA) to expand the event's offerings. 2025 was the first year the group collaborated on this event.

Collaborating with KASA enabled ASA to significantly expand its reach through additional promotion and outreach, something previously supplemented by campus DEI offices.

"We had a strong relationship with the DEI office when it came to event promotion," said Amritha Selvaraj, ASA vice president and second-year student. "They were always eager to repost our materials and ensure our hard work in organizing events and fundraisers reached a wider audience and didn't go unnoticed."

One organization that was already in constant collaboration with other student orgs is Charlotte's Black Organizations Alliance Board or 'BOAB'.

BOAB aims to connect and support Black UNC Charlotte students through support and campus events.

BOAB consistently collaborates with other Black student-serving organizations like the

Black Student Union and Building Black Students. To celebrate Black History Month, BOAB collaborated with 16 other student orgs for their Black History Month Kickoff Party on Feb. 7.

“Alliances and collaborations have always been a cornerstone of what we do—it’s literally the ‘A’ in BOAB,” said the BOAB E-board. “Our organization was built on a mission to foster a closer community among Minority-focused organizations, and that mission will continue, with or without DEI.”

Not only collaborating with student organizations but campus departments as well, BOAB and those departments can no longer collaborate as they used to.

According to the BOAB E-board, when campus departments present at BOAB meetings, the presenters can no longer have catered presentations that specifically serve the organization’s audience.

This change, likely enforced to maintain neutrality, means that the students no longer have information reinforced or presented by departments, putting the stress to do so entirely on student leaders.

New restrictions like this that emphasize neutrality have made it more difficult for BOAB to hold events, to begin with, as collaborators are unsure of what is and is not allowed.

“It’s harder to connect with

other departments now because there was and still is a bit of fear about how to navigate things moving forward,” said Eunice Okyere, third-year student and BOAB vice president. “For instance, if we want to collaborate with a wellness department on campus on an event—let’s say, about wellness supporting Black men and women—are they even allowed to support and endorse that?”

“We’ve realized we can no longer rely on the school for the same level of support,” added Okyere.

Also facing a deficiency of support from campus departments is Prism, an LGBTQIA+ student organization made to uplift LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Kai Meehan, Prism president and fourth-year student, shared that the guidance Prism received from IEE helped make one of their largest annual events, ‘Pride Prom,’ successful.

Now that the IEE office has dissolved, Meehan and Prism have struggled to organize the event.

“We are still planning on having this event, but without the University’s support, it is complicated to figure out those nuances,” said Meehan.

Paired with the struggle to gain support from campus departments is a loss of resources for student orgs previously provided by DEI offices.

“One major impact has been

the loss of free printing services through the DEI office,” said Selvaraj of ASA. “While it may seem like a small thing, it was incredibly useful, as it saved us from paying out of pocket for flyers and other materials that were essential to running our club.”

Between the five student orgs was a shared negative initial reaction to the dissolution of DEI programming on campus.

“DEI programs have been critical in supporting underrepresented students,” said Valle. “Their removal feels like an attempt to erase our voices and make it harder for marginalized communities to organize and advocate for themselves.”

“[I felt] anger,” said Morgan Debow, a second-year student and BOAB public relations coordinator. “I chose Charlotte for its diversity and then had to wonder if the same opportunities would still be available.”

“I felt DEI was doing more help than harm,” said BOAB at-large assistant Shameer Garrett, a second-year student. “So why take away something that was making a positive difference?”

“I can’t think of a single positive outcome to come from [DEI’s dismantling] while it negatively impacts things like inclusion, education, having fewer safe spaces and mental well-being,” said Avery Huntsinger, Prism vice pres-

ident and fourth-year student. “I hope that if anything comes from the programs being shut down, it is that people grow from the mistakes of closing them.”

Huntsinger shared that when Charlotte’s DEI offices were announced to be closing on campus, they had just “came out of the closet,” meaning that they had no campus resources to help with the adjustment.

Fortunately, Huntsinger found Prism in the fall 2024 semester and has since bonded with members of the organization.

“We find a sense of celebration and unity when we come together, and I’m incredibly grateful to be part of such an amazing group,” said Huntsinger.

With the safe spaces Huntsinger initially sought still hard to find, student organizations like Prism are more important than ever.

“Even though DEI programs are being dismantled, the need for them has not disappeared,” said Valle. “Organizations like LACE exist because Latinx students and other underrepresented communities still face challenges that can’t be ignored. We will continue to advocate, educate and empower, regardless of the obstacles put in our way.”

STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS



UNC CHARLOTTE ASIAN STUDENT ASSOCIATION

@CLTASA
FOUNDED IN: 2017
NICKNAME: ASA



BLACK ORGANIZATION ALLIANCE BOARD

@BOAB.UNCC
FOUNDED IN: 2022
NICKNAME: BOAB



LATINOS FOR ACTION, CHANGE, & EMPOWERMENT AT UNC CHARLOTTE

@CLTLACE
FOUNDED IN: 2025
NICKNAME: LACE



PRISM

@PRISMUNCC
FOUNDED IN: 2021
NICKNAME: PRISM



UNITY IN DIVERSITY AT CHARLOTTE

@UNITYINDIVERSITY.UNCC
FOUNDED IN: 2024
NICKNAME: UID



Courtesy of UNC Charlotte Black Organization Alliance Board



Courtesy of United in Diversity



Courtesy of UNC Charlotte Prism



Courtesy of Latinos for Action, Change, & Empowerment at UNC Charlotte



Courtesy of UNC Charlotte Asian Students Association

unnecessary angry distracting disgraceful anti-American political disheartened
finally scared horrific worried target

DEI CUTS AT CHAR

disappointed sickening bad
weaponized exhausting optimistic

Reactions to the DEI reversal at UNC Charlotte

120 STUDENTS
SHARE THEIR
THOUGHTS
ON DEI CUTS
VIA NINER
TIMES SURVEY

Sunnya Hadavi | Multimedia Managing Editor

52
LGBTQIA+

32
FIRST-GEN

Survey's most
represented
identities

34
PEOPLE OF
COLOR

30
NONE OF THE
OTHERS

20
DISABLED

The UNC System Board of Governors passed its anti-DEI policies in May 2024 and required all its institutions to comply by Sept. 1.

When asked, 70% of these students said UNC Charlotte had no problem with too much DEI programming before the changes. 73% believe the University has cut too much of its diversity and inclusion programs.

"I was shocked. I didn't even know what was going on, and all of a sudden [DEI] was gone. I didn't quite process it, and it felt like some kind of joke. I don't understand the point of getting rid of these programs," said fourth-year Eli Lindsay. "It may not matter to those who don't benefit from these programs, and it may seem unnecessary, but it isn't.

Discrimination still occurs in 2025, and these programs ensure

that there's a safe space for those who are different in any sense. They can even help in instances of prejudice and discrimination within UNC Charlotte."

One student highlighted the implication of the new policy on student growth and productivity.

"This policy greatly undermines what it means to be a student and what so many others have fought for before us," said an anonymous first-year. "Without diversity, we do not learn from others. Without equity, we do not grow with others. Without inclusion, we do not have others. DEI is not a political talking point; it is necessary for a functional and productive society."

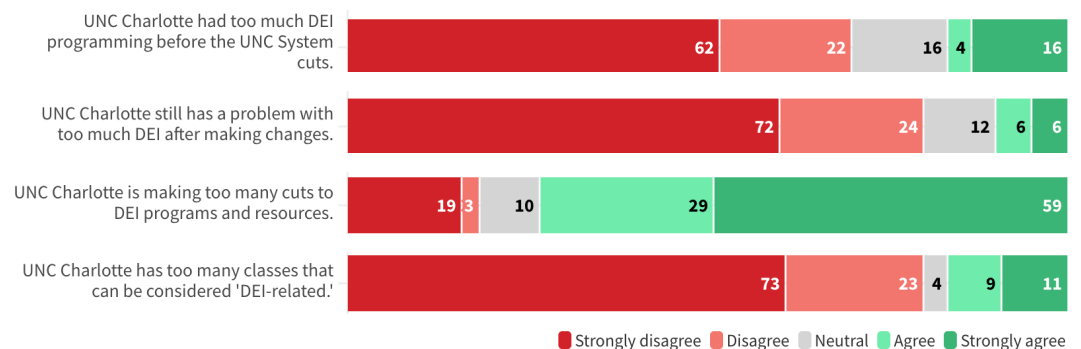
A second-year student who is against DEI policies feels that its removal signifies the start of their inclusion on campus.

"I personally feel optimistic about these changes. Being a homeschooled conservative Christian heterosexual white male, I felt a bit like I was getting the short end of the stick and that agendas I disagree with were being flashed in my face (especially when it comes to scholarships)," said an anonymous second-year. "Now, I can breathe a little easier knowing that with the dissolution of DEI, I will start actually being included."

Another student feels the new policy allows merit to be at the forefront of student success.

"I am grateful for it to be removed, as it focuses more on the achievements of people rather than using personal identification," said an anonymous student. "It makes me feel as though my hard work and success are what define me, rather than checking off boxes in areas that bear no merit on my accomplishments."

Survey responses (out of 120 students)





Upcoming changes to diversity in academics

More diversity-related cuts are on the horizon with the UNC System's new policy cutting required coursework relating to DEI. General education classes with topics falling under diversity have already been suspended.

"I think it's a bit silly to end support for classes which might fall into [the DEI] category. If you don't like the class, don't take it," said first-year Gwen Perry.

This new policy raises concerns among students and faculty about academic freedom and intellectual thought.

"Not a single point in time have I been expressly told what to think or believe in class or on campus," said Singer. "Instead, I've had my personal beliefs challenged over and over again, and it's shaped me to be a more well-rounded and empathetic person."

Academic programs such as Africana Studies and Women's and Gender Studies may be seeing changes, but the University has not yet confirmed if and how. According to the University, "Academic Affairs is currently examining degree-specific mandatory DEI course requirements."

"So many of my professors are scared it might be their last time teaching a course that they've been teaching for 20+ years," said an anonymous third-year minoring in Women's and Gender Studies. "My minor, as well as Africana Studies, were literally put on a list stating that these programs have more than 50% DEI-related content and are on the verge of being cut."

80% of the students asked do not believe UNC Charlotte has a problem with too many classes that can be considered 'DEI-related.' 17% believe the University does.

"I think the policy is a great first step, but it hasn't gone far enough," said fourth-year Matthew Montano. "We need to get rid of all departments that are DEI but in name only and root out all of the multitudinous influences of DEI in educational programming, governance and the overall culture of UNC Charlotte."

The future of DEI on campus

The University has remained relatively quiet about any upcoming and potential changes relating to diversity and other Executive Orders. While email notices are few and far between, the University tracks applicable laws and policies and shares information at inside.charlotte.edu.

Since the passing of UNC System policies, University staff and faculty have been much quieter about their thoughts on DEI and related changes, especially when speaking with the Niner Times or news publications on the record.

Some of this comes from the University's compliance with North Carolina state laws on institutional neutrality. However, some fear repercussions, especially non-tenured faculty whose jobs are unprotected.

"I don't know how many programs might be cut because of this, how many necessary courses, and the state of censorship going around in the classroom from both professors and students," said an anonymous third-year. "So many staff are not allowed to speak on the DEI or IEE offices being shut down, and if you don't understand how terrifying that is, you need to open your eyes. This is only the beginning. We must fight for who we are and our right to be here."

As of March 2025, students still have the ability and freedom to form organizations relating to DEI topics and host organization events. No current UNC System or federal Executive Orders explicitly block these student-sponsored activities.

"To my fellow students, we can no longer rely on the institutions we have trusted to serve us. We have to work together and rely on each other to create a fair and inclusive learning environment and, by extension, society," an anonymous fourth-year. "We have the power to form organizations, speak out about what's right, make reasonable demands of administration, express our feelings and take care of each other. If our institutions refuse to help us, we have to help ourselves and help each other in any way we can."

WHAT DOES DEI MEAN TO YOU?

DEI means ensuring that everyone has a seat at the table. That people aren't excluded before they ever have a chance.

Nichole Moffat, second-year

DEI means unlocking the entirety of the past, present, and future (and our lives) for the sake of offering more viewpoints that aren't accessible to us. With DEI, we are allowed to tackle issues we face with a variety of improved and effective solutions. Without it, we only get one.

Anonymous first-year

DEI is a cancerous manifestation of communism within the contexts of race and sex that needs to be extracted from our Universities at all costs.

Matthew Montano, fourth-year

DEI hurts the very people that they think it helps. When you tell a minority that they aren't able to compete with the average person, and have people with lower qualifications get the job, it brings them down.

R.B., first-year student

DEI is about caring enough to value all identities, regardless of skin color, gender, sexuality, identity or any other piece that makes us ourselves. Our differences are what make us special, and DEI is meant to value these identities and give opportunities to those that might not otherwise get them.

Anonymous third-year

As someone with a learning disability, DEI has helped me keep up with classes and the information I am learning.

Anonymous fourth-year

Want to know more about our survey?
Read more at ninertimes.com



Students share perspectives about DEI policies at Charlotte and nationwide

Having previously participated in an engineering ethics program, DEI is something I find important, even in the field of engineering. Part of why I believe diversity to be so important in engineering, is that our life experiences influence our own work. By having a diverse set of engineers, more possibilities can be considered, reducing the chances of an embarrassing situation, such as a case where automatic soap dispensers didn't work for people with dark skin.

Anonymous fourth-year

As a woman of color, an immigrant, a queer person and a disabled person, these decisions are made because those with power are uncomfortable with my existence and what I face because of my existence.

It is a disservice to young people and future generations because whether or not one is comfortable with these labels, discrimination and inequity are a part of reality.

A.M., third-year

I am greatly disappointed in this country. If our country is truly committed to being 'the best' as well as 'free' then why is the current administration so keen on stripping people of the rights they deserve?

Nichole Moffat, second-year

DEI to me sounds like a good idea in theory (helping people be perceived as equals), but in reality, it sounds more like favoritism based on skin color, sexuality, gender identity, etc. It has become weaponized to do the very thing it was supposed to work against.

Anonymous

I think the DEI policy further enabled racism and hindered equality of opportunity. I'm glad it's gone because merit and ability should be the only things that people win or lose opportunities on.

Gabriel Sarmiento, third-year

You [the UNC System Board of Governors] have failed your students and shown them that you do not care about them and will not look out for them. You have shown that you only care about your own self-interests. You have put profit and eager compliancy above the safety, success and wellbeing of your students.

Anonymous fourth-year

I lost a master's program grant opportunity because of these changes, and I'm not the only one. These policies have real, painful consequences for students who are just trying to build a better future. It's easy for decision-makers to talk about 'fairness' in theory, but in practice, they're pulling opportunities away from the very people DEI was created to support.

This isn't just politics—it's people's lives, education and futures on the line.

Nasratu Tunis, alumna

If you believe in the growth of this great state, you need to show the diverse citizens of it that you are willing to fight for them. Do not just shy away from a tough battle because it benefits your politics or pockets.

Anonymous

We are a people who are naturally going to be diverse in thoughts and appearances. Focusing on these things regardless of how they're focused will ultimately hurt society as it will cause and spread hate throughout people. DEI doesn't solve prejudice, it exacerbates it.

Anonymous

Throughout my time here, [my curriculum] has been good to me, but we need more not topics like these, not less.

There are professors who make a career out of DEI in their teachings because it is inherent in what they teach. I don't know how that looks going forward for say a subject like sociology if we cannot even be honest about who the marginalized groups in society are.

Anonymous fourth-year

I feel as if I were betrayed by UNC Charlotte. I remember choosing Charlotte with the assurance that there were these labeled safe spaces on campus, and I was even shown the DEI office when on tour. It hurts knowing that almost immediately after the ruling was made, they removed any instance of DEI on campus.

Eli Singer, second-year

[These policies] really ruined the 'diversity' aspect that [UNC Charlotte] often promotes. Without DEI and the programs within it that actually helped support the students, staff and faculty, this 'diversity' aspect really means nothing.

Anonymous first-year

America and Charlotte by extension is a melting pot of different types of people. That is just a fact. Trying so hard to convince people that that is actually a bad thing is benefiting none of our community and just fosters ignorance and hostility.

Gwen Perry, first-year

The programs and offices that were removed from UNC Charlotte had provided experiences for me that improved my confidence, built my social network, and inspired me to give back to my community. This policy has also equated to strong censorship in other programs and opportunities on campus as certain words such as 'advocacy' are discouraged.

Anonymous fourth-year

DEI is a very sensitive subject. I'm not saying that I don't support giving everyone equal opportunity, but I am saying that giving people jobs or special treatment because of their gender or skin color should not be allowed.

Anonymous second-year

I feel that the removal of DEI programs has significantly impacted the ability for individuals to identify with the campus at Charlotte and will continue to impact students.

Cole Mlostek, third-year

Editorial: We will not let DEI disappear

Niner Times Editorial Board

This is no longer something you hear about happening in another state or see on TV from a rambling show host; it is a crystal clear message declared by elected officials and CEOs: 'DEI doesn't matter.'

On Feb 5, the UNC System echoed this message, suspending required diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) courses at UNC System institutions. This suspension stems from an executive order from President Donald Trump that intends to remove DEI from college classrooms and follows an appalling series of events that signal a push to end all DEI initiatives.

Legislators and corporations are crusading against DEI, and the consequences are already unfolding in real time, sparking widespread concern. Rightfully so, as these actions are a deliberate attempt to suppress recognition of race, identity and systemic inequality, all under the guise of neutrality.

The dismantling of DEI is no longer a distant issue; it is happening here at UNC Charlotte and affects people you know and care about.

DEI shapes the familiar faces you interact with daily: your lab partner, roommate, professor. These are real people and communities who breathe life into this campus, providing welcome spaces, support and energy to a campus that would just be empty walls and quiet sidewalks without them.

For a campus where its diversity drives student life, DEI should be showcased, not suppressed.

We at the Niner Times want to reaffirm the Niner Times' longstanding commitment to inclusivity, integrity and accountability in our reporting, as these values are inseparable from the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion.

After connecting with the campus and the groups that benefit from DEI, we have found it impossible not to be hyperaware of how need-

the diverse communities that make Charlotte the place we are all proud to call home.

Unfortunately, through the same reporting, we have seen safe spaces for those communities disappear overnight as places that once offered belonging and security have been replaced by uncertainty and fear.

We were there to see the passion and pain on our peers' faces as they protested outside Charlotte's April 23 Board of Trustees meeting and heard from students who exclaimed Charlotte could not be Charlotte without DEI.

In May, we watched students again protest during the UNC System Board of Governors vote to close DEI offices across the UNC System. Their voices fell upon deaf ears.

Now, with DEI offices shut down on Charlotte's campus, we have continued to cover students as they grapple with the absence of DEI offices and express the concern they feel for the future of their communities.

As attacks against DEI pile on, these concerns will continue to grow as Charlotte's diverse campus is told that its identity, its voice and its needs are plainly unimportant.

While our work requires impartiality, as students deeply connected to campus, we find it impossible not to feel for the people we work, learn and live with. Furthermore, it is challenging to comprehend how those in power can so easily tune out the voices of the students their institutions are meant to serve.

Despite what our lawmakers or representatives might signal, Charlotte's diversity is intrinsically tied to its identity as the engine that powers the school's campus life. The monotone and mute campus that those in power seek to create for the sake of colorblindness or neutrality would not be a more neutral campus but one void of the culture.

celebration that students deserve.

In the face of the lack of any University-sanctioned celebration, we have pushed to do the same as other student organizations have and only upped our recognition of diversity on campus.

Last semester, we published our first Hispanic Heritage Month Edition and followed this up in March by releasing our Women's History Month Edition. Paired with this, we have increased community outreach with feedback forms and further campus engagement while doubling recruiting efforts to ensure all perspectives are included in our newsroom.

This effort to continue our coverage of all groups and stand with values intertwined with DEI is not a political stance or act of defiance but fundamental journalism.

Under the Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics, the code's first section reads, "Boldly tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience. Seek sources whose voices we seldom hear."

Also in alignment with our code of ethics is our continued dedication to truthful and unbiased reporting, despite any feelings towards DEI. We understand that our reporting is no place for our own thoughts and feelings and will continue to work with integrity to tell the whole truth and nothing but in every article.

We recognize and celebrate that our campus is a melting pot of identities, experiences and perspectives. Our responsibility as a publication is to ensure that every story and every student is seen, heard and represented.

That will not change, regardless of the actions or policies of our government, corporations or even other media institutions.

“

“No matter who you are at UNC Charlotte, your story matters, and we are here to tell it. We encourage you to reach out, share your experiences and hold us accountable to our mission.”

- Niner Times Editorial Board

lessly damaging these moves to dismantle DEI are.

In writing for the Niner Times, our fingers have been on the pulse of Charlotte's campus through our coverage of arts and culture, sports and student opinion.

With this coverage, we have been truly fortunate to learn about and build relationships with

Yet, we are not alone in witnessing the effects of DEI's deconstruction.

We are at the tail end of Women's History Month, and the University finds itself unable to celebrate its women and its rich history fully. Where once the campus was alive with events, recognition and celebration, 2025 brings silence in a forced absence of the acknowledgment and

No matter who you are at UNC Charlotte, your story matters, and we are here to tell it. We encourage you to reach out, share your experiences and hold us accountable to our mission.



DEI cuts spark student concern over changes to Women's and Gender, Africana Studies

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor

The recent rollback of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives at UNC Charlotte has raised concerns about the future of certain academic programs. Specifically, Women's and Gender Studies (WGST) and Africana Studies are projected to be at the highest risk of cuts due to their focus on marginalized communities.

This shift threatens the continued support and development of these fields of study.

While the Africana Studies department has existed since 1969, the WGST program was only officially established at Charlotte in March 2023.

Although generations apart, current students Nandi Boini and Angelia Grant both have seen a rise in concern in their programs amid ongoing national DEI dismantlings.

Both Boini and Grant have confirmed that their courses have not been removed as of March 22, 2025, but they have seen through their DegreeWorks or heard from peers that certain classes are no longer required as general education courses.

These changes align with the recent UNC System policy that mandates UNC System institutions eliminate any course with over 50% of its material content associated with DEI in general education requirements.

According to Boini, students can opt out of their required general education courses without penalty if they have DEI-related material. However, there are still concerns that the areas of study may see complete dissolution as time passes.

Originally a member of UNC Charlotte's class of 1988, Grant had to put a pause on completing her degree in Africana Studies due to a work opportunity. She returned to complete her degree in 2024 after realizing she might be one of the last to do so if the degree pathway was cut.

"Back in the '80s and '90s, UNC Charlotte was very divided. And I'm hoping that the campus won't go back to that way, so I'm pushing to get this degree because if they [the University] lose the funding, we [current students] might be the last group of folks that will be able to get that particular degree," said Grant, a WGST graduate student.

In light of recent events, Grant said there has been consistent tension in the WGST class atmosphere since the DEI rollback announcement on Feb. 5.

"I just feel like the department [WGST] is kind of on eggshells right now, and this could be it. This could be the last time we could return to campus," said Grant. "Just like our federal workers have been getting an email saying, 'Come and pack up your items,' I would not be surprised if

that happened [for WGST and Africana]. Then [we] would have to either look at a way to go to a private university, or they may have to start doing stuff online."

Amidst a changing classroom dynamic, Boini reflected on the noticeable shift in class participation and the extra challenge in navigating political discourse in her political science and WGST classes.

"I felt this shift in my classes where there are fewer students of color and more students hesitant to speak up," said Boini, a third-year in Africana Studies. "In a lot of my classes, I've seen a lot of white Republican men speaking out, and professors entertaining their thought processes. I wonder if professors are being told 'you can't suppress ideas' because I know that the part of the DEI changes was implementing institutional neutrality, the idea that you can't promote any politically related ideology."

Boini added that, along with other students, when the Board of Governors initially announced the DEI removal in May 2024, they predicted that the Charlotte student population would take it the hardest.

"When it comes to Charlotte, we are such a diverse environment. I feel like our students of color really thrive here," said Boini. "We're not only seen, we're not just accepted, but we're celebrated. So I knew that those DEI changes would hit us particularly hard because we have so many programs and departments dedicated to creating a more diverse and inclusive environment."

The two expressed their intent to use their education to encourage others to speak out and inform the younger generations, even if their programs face further pushback.

"The best thing we can do is mobilize and have a community cause; that's what they're trying to attack. DEI is an attack on marginalized spaces for marginalized people. The most powerful form of resistance we can have is activism. Joy is activism; love is activism," said Boini.

In light of ongoing concerns about the future of academic programs, faculty members within the WGST program have expressed their steadfast commitment to their missions and continued success.

"The University and CHES [College of Humanities & Earth and Social Sciences] remain committed to the health and mission of the Women's and Gender Studies Program, understanding it to be a vital piece of the institution's

mission and the success of its students. Although DEI initiatives are the subject of much conversation right now, we will continue to educate our students and conduct our scholarship as we always have," wrote Kent Brintnall, interim program director of Women's and Gender Studies.

While students have raised concerns about potential changes, faculty continue to emphasize that such discussions remain speculative.

"The speculation about what programs are facing is simply that, speculation. We have not been alerted or informed of pushbacks. If the University is doing pushbacks, it is beyond us and possi-

Ava Weaver/Niner Times & courtesy of UNC Charlotte

bly at the level of compliance; not at the departmental levels, certainly not ours," wrote Eddy Souffrant, professor of philosophy and chair of Africana Studies.

The future of programs like Women's and Gender Studies and Africana Studies remains in limbo.

However, the resilience and determination of those invested in these fields signal that their fight for inclusion and representation will persist, regardless of the challenges ahead.



Column: Charlotte Athletics needs United in GOLD

Kelli Blackburn | Sports Editor

On Oct. 2, 2020, Charlotte Athletics introduced the United in GOLD initiative—a DEI-focused organization aimed at creating an inclusive and educational community for athletes and coaches to come together to unite and address campus-wide issues.

However, the reconfiguration of DEI resources across the UNC system in May of 2024 led to the initiative's unfortunate dismantling, removing the safe space that athletes had carefully cultivated.

The "GOLD" in the organization's name stood for "Growing Our Leaders in Diversity," but with this resource now gone, what does that mean for the growth and development of these potential leaders?

While some athletes may still feel supported within their own teams, others may have relied on United in GOLD to find a safe space and community as they navigated college athletics. The initiative offered a unique platform for voices that might otherwise go unheard.

"The 'United in GOLD' (Growing Our Leaders in Diversity) Initiative is a commitment within Charlotte Athletics to promote diversity, equity and inclusion and to eradicate hate," said Charlotte Athletics.

At its peak, the organization benefited 450 student-athletes across 19 of Charlotte's Division I programs. It also championed nine core pillars: engage, vote, serve, learn, speak, listen, act, share and support—principles now at risk of losing visibility as DEI conversations diminish on campus.

"Engage represents the importance of getting involved and participating with our peers to cultivate a greater understanding of racism," said 2020-2021 graduate student distance runner Paul Arredondo.

The initiative's impact reached beyond student-athletes. Athletic directors, coaches and athletes gathered for monthly meetings to discuss how to create positive change across their programs and the broader campus community.

Though some athletic organizations continue to host events that promote similar values—such as the Mental Health Matters game between the women's soccer team and the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC)—others have faced challenges when speaking up about equity.

A critical aspect of United in GOLD was the resources it provided to help athletes and staff learn about each other's diverse experiences and

the world around them. These opportunities for education and understanding are now minimized.

"As a representative of UNC Charlotte, I try to represent this university as an active listener and learn from the diverse group I surround myself with," said graduate student pole vaulter Elijah Cole. "As staff and students, we are always trying to find a better understanding of each other. If we don't push ourselves to understand situations in other people's shoes, we won't be able to progress and move forward positively."

Charlotte Athletics needs to rekindle a platform for individuals to highlight their experiences and struggles, analyze challenges critically and drive positive change in a world that constantly faces chaos.

While athletes and coaches can still access mental health counselors for support, the absence of a collective and supportive community like United in GOLD has left a gap.

Outreach to the greater community extends beyond meetings or face-to-face interactions—it also reaches into social media. The absence of United in GOLD has made it increasingly difficult for athletic programs to publicly recognize cultural events like Black History Month or Hispanic Heritage Month. These celebrations once helped foster a welcoming, educational environment that elevated the visibility and inclusiveness of Charlotte's athletic programs.

The loss of United in GOLD has not only drawn attention away from these essential discussions but also hindered the platform for growth and meaningful change.

While SAAC is an NCAA-wide organization for student-athletes that promotes guiding principles of respect for diversity and the protection of well-being, Charlotte still needs to create a closer-knit community for those who might not be involved in it. SAAC only covers a small amount of DEI-related issues and more issues that lie within the athletics issues itself.

DEI realignment were said to be a work in progress, but when will they be more visible and reach athletics?

Progress and everything good come with time, but the need for improvement and positivity should remain a constant effort. The absence of collective voices leaves a notable silence—one that signals a need for renewed action and a game-changing environment.



Courtesy of Charlotte Athletics

Queer athletes find haven in club sports amidst inclusivity policy reversals

Clare Grealey | Copy Editor

Editors Note: All interviewees asked to remain anonymous and have chosen pseudonyms.

Amidst nationwide DEI dismantling, more and more safe spaces on UNC Charlotte's campus have begun to shutter and dial back their activities. On the other hand, club sports continue to provide a place of community and encouragement for campus athletes from all backgrounds.

Club sports as safe spaces

At UNC Charlotte, there are 37 active club sports organizations, serving 1,881 students, with 1/3 of those students identifying as women. Club sports provide athletes a way to continue playing the sport they love, even if outside factors are at play.

For some, those outside factors lead to a sense of disillusionment in the sport they love.

Celia, a third-year club field hockey player, was initially preparing to play Division 1 (D1) in the NCAA, but after being sidelined for a year due to a hand injury, was unable to pursue a D1 athletic career. After stepping away from athletics for a period of time, she decided to join Charlotte's club field hockey team in the fall of 2023.

Celia spoke extensively about the pressures not just of D1 athletics but of sports in general and the relief that club sports can provide.

"I think people are drawn more to club sports because a lot of people lose their love for a sport when there is so much pressure put on them," said Celia. "I feel like club sports takes away that pressure while still being able to enjoy the game without having all the pressure of being an NCAA athlete."

Response to DEI removal

Although the DEI-related policies and new guidelines do not directly affect club sports' funding or operations, some athletes are worried about the effect of institutional neutrality and the possibility of further rollbacks in the future.

"I worry that since we're [Charlotte] going to be a neutral institution, we might not be able to advocate as much as we do for queer athletes," said Celia. "It just worries me that we could [if things change] get in trouble with the University for, say, if we had a pride game or a game that focused funds to a local LGBTQ+ organization."

Charlotte is a diverse school, which is also true of club sports. As a result, the notion of further DEI cuts and Charlotte's move towards institu-

tional neutrality can feel discouraging for some.

"I think DEI is a really important thing that we need to have," said Celia. "Seeing the [DEI] rollbacks, especially as a political science major, has been crazy because so much of my academic field has been focused on identity, culture and peace studies."

Delilah, a second-year club athlete, has been involved in sports since seventh grade and has seen the effects of these DEI rollbacks elsewhere in the University, including a friend of hers having a grant cut for her research on LGBTQ+ topics.

"They [Charlotte] just cut the grant, so they don't have it anymore. It's just like, what's the point?" said Delilah. "Where are you putting that money instead? You're not using it for good. You're just taking it away."

Experience as a queer athlete

For many, college is a time when they can come to terms with who they are. In that vein, club sports have become a safe haven for some, with the team environment spurring their own journeys.

"I kept that part of myself [bisexuality] closed off for so, so long, especially in high school, and coming to Charlotte and joining the team changed my mindset on closing that part of myself off," said Celia. "I feel like I'm in an environment where I can finally be myself, and I've definitely become more comfortable with that part of myself over the last two years."

Growing up in the South, Christina had not experienced being on a team with openly queer athletes until she came to Charlotte and met players who were from Northern states, such as New York or New Jersey.

"They [Northern players] were like, 'Oh yeah, half my club team was gay,' and I was like, 'Y'all were telling people?'" said Christina. "I look back at my [high school] club team, I probably was the one [queer] person, and people didn't even really know because I didn't tell them."

"Once I got to college, I felt that I was able to reinvent myself a little bit, just being more honest with people," added Christina.

A shared phrase among the athletes to describe club sports was that it is a 'support system.' Whether it acts as an escape from the grueling hours of academics, stress in someone's personal life or worries about the world, club sports have allowed these athletes to shake off the weight of the world for a time.

"Even if we have a bad practice or we have a bad game, you show up every Monday and

Wednesday [for practice], you clear everything that's going on in your mind, you go, you play and everything feels okay for two hours," said Celia. "The world might be falling apart, but in that moment, everything is okay."

Christina disclosed that when she was outed to her family, the first people she texted were her teammates, and she felt incredibly supported by her fellow players, regardless of sexual orientation.

"Even though maybe they [teammates] are straight, and they weren't experiencing that, they heard about it, and they were like, 'Oh my gosh, I just want you to know, I've been thinking about you all day,' that sort of thing," said Christina.

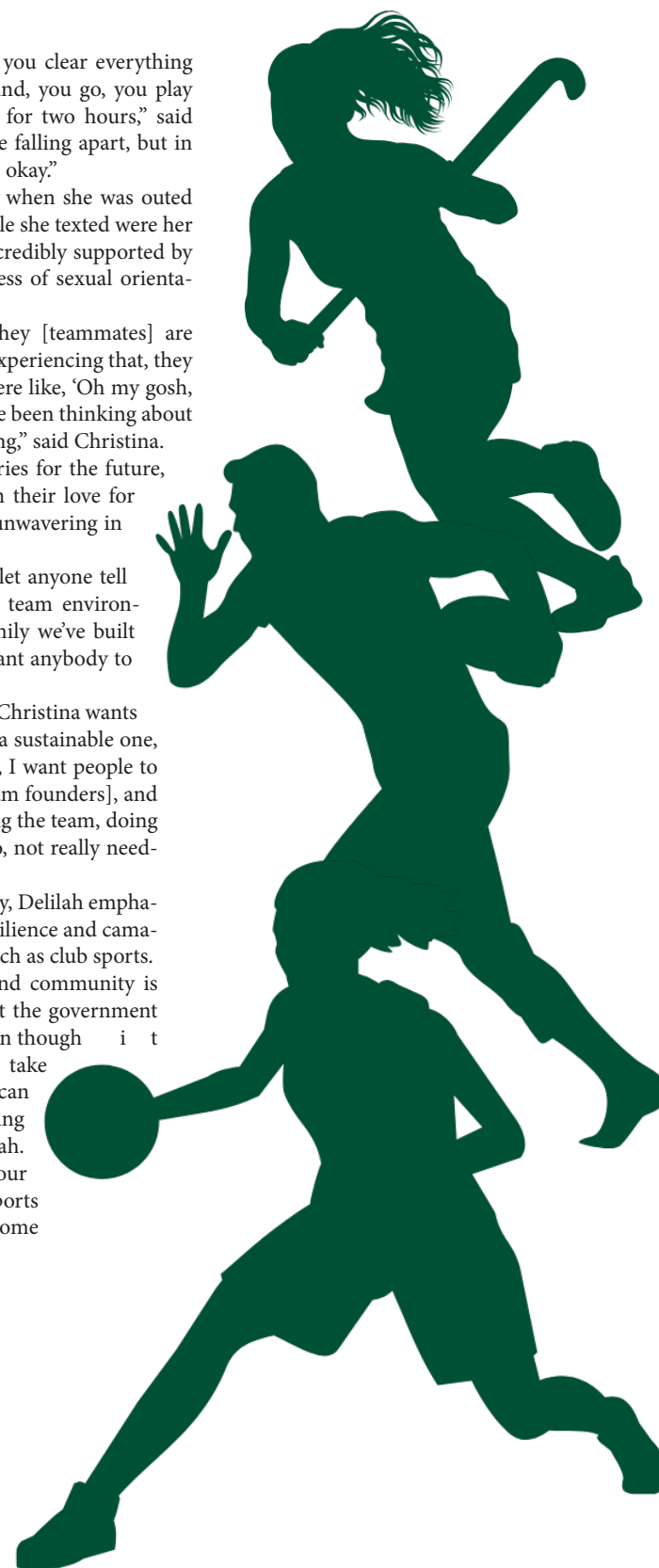
Although there are worries for the future, the players are steadfast in their love for athletics and their teams, unwavering in their beliefs.

"[I hope] we don't ever let anyone tell us to change because our team environment is so special, the family we've built is so special, and I don't want anybody to ever ruin that," said Celia.

Gearing up to graduate, Christina wants to make sure her legacy is a sustainable one, declaring that "in 10 years, I want people to have never heard of us [team founders], and they are completely running the team, doing everything they need to do, not really needing any help."

Amidst times of adversity, Delilah emphasized the importance of resilience and camaraderie in environments such as club sports.

"The power of sports and community is so much greater than what the government is doing right now, and even though it hurts to see people try to take that away from us, I can come to sports as my coping mechanism," said Delilah. "So, I do have hope in our generation and our sports community that we can come back from these rollbacks."



Opinion: Diversity is the foundation of what makes UNC Charlotte unique

Ruhshona Soledjonova | Staff Writer

UNC Charlotte is rapidly growing and is recognized for areas of research, economic opportunities and a diverse population. However, diversity is not just a component of our people; it is the foundation of what makes this university unique.

How does this set us apart from other universities, and why does it matter? Charlotte has been a leading example of diversity and flourishing education in North Carolina, ranking No. 1 for awarding bachelor's degrees to minority students in 2023 and 2024.

When you look, listen and observe around campus, diversity is a core feature that resonates with every student, faculty member and visitor. As of 2024, roughly 42% of the student body's race and ethnicity identified as a minority, including Black, Hispanic, Asian American, Native

American and Pacific Islander. This statistic is a key aspect of our Niner Nation and influences our present and future contributions to society.

Diversity influences all corners of Charlotte, from the hushed halls of Atkins Library to the lively atmosphere of the Popp-Martin Student Union. Across campus, in the loud crowds at Jerry Richardson Stadium, these experiences form the diversity of our environment.

Now more than ever, diversity has become a difficult conversation, but our campus culture thrives off of people from different social and ethnic backgrounds. Consider diversity in academics. Charlotte's academic recognition has grown immensely, and we are now classified as an R1 institution. This long-awaited recognition means that students in STEM, arts and culture fields are dedicated to research and

taking innovative approaches to understanding and shaping the world.

Without the contributions of diverse backgrounds and perspectives that make up our academics, Charlotte would not have achieved this level of visibility. As our accolades grow, we must upkeep our priority for inclusion and continuous improvement of educational quality.

The same thought applies in our non-academic departments, such as athletics and the arts. Charlotte is creating an environment for students to explore a world of passions while also having a period of growth to navigate realities. The University's athletes and musicians work extensively not only to establish their own reputation but also to uplift the University's reputation.

Embracing diversity across campus, supporting marginalized groups and acknowl-

edging the valuable contributions that diversity offers will strengthen our campus culture and continue to encourage a future generation of Niners.

Diversity shapes the future of Charlotte, and it continues to do so whether policies recognize its importance or not. Previously, this university began as a college center with segregated schools.

Today, we see our student body of diverse backgrounds experience life and education together because that is what makes a Niner. While many try to avoid recognizing diversity, our core vision and student growth inspire diversity to flourish and not be stripped away.



Niner Times File

Opinion: Conservatives are using ‘DEI’ as a catch-all for sugar-coated bigotry

Emsley Jackson | Opinion Editor

Conservatives have been blaming diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives for many of the problems in our country. They have adapted DEI, the noun, as a way to unfairly level the playing field. DEI, the adjective, is being used as an insult, a character hit and a thinly-cloaked slur.

The use of this DEI affront is a red herring for racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia and more. Donald Trump and his conservative army do not want a ‘merit-based system.’ They want to return to a system where you have no merit.

DEI has been spit venomously at individuals from marginalized communities with Klan-like fury. Anger that the groups of people who have spent generations systematically held back and out of sight are moving up in the world is bubbling to the surface.

On former Vice President Kamala Harris’s first day on the campaign trail back in July 2024, a Republican congressman from Tennessee, Tim Burchett, proudly told CNN, “100% she is a DEI hire(...)Her record is abysmal at best.”

The politician with two degrees, over three decades of work experience in all three branches of government and the support of enough American citizens to run for president twice was hired purely because she was a woman of color. This

comes from an individual whose most notable lawmaking act was a bill proposal legalizing the consumption of roadkill. Sticks and stones, Congressman, sticks and stones.

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, is looking up at us right now and laughing because, unfortunately, he was right about many things. Freud and his daughter, Anna Freud, theorized about different defense mechanisms that are “unconscious resources used by the ego.” One of these mechanisms is projection, being suspicious of one’s own problems in others.

So, hypothetically speaking, an individual who knows they are not qualified for a position and feels threatened might find themselves attacking others by reason that these other people are not qualified in theirs.

Contrary to the beliefs of the Trump administration and those who think they are immune, DEI encompasses more groups than just people of color and LGBTQIA+ individuals. DEI programs have created opportunities for women, students, disabled people, veterans and those of a lower socioeconomic status.

As stated in an NPR article about the Biden administration’s efforts to improve life for Americans with disabilities, “26% of American adults, or 61 million people, have a disability.”

This makes disabled Americans the largest minority group in the country. Adjacent, almost 30% of veterans reported having “a compensable service-connected disability, which is a medical condition that develops or worsens during a service member’s time in the military,” in 2022.

Suppose Americans who fought for our country or individuals with disabilities were the faces of DEI in the minds of vengeful conservatives. They might think twice about their waged war against the undeserving.

If you have seen the classic classroom poster, ‘Equality vs. Equity,’ you know that the two are not interchangeable. Three kids of differing heights are trying to watch a game from behind a fence. If you give all three one box to stand on each, not only can all three not see, but the tallest kid has an even better vantage point than before. Equity means that everyone gets what they need so we can all watch the game. Some of us require more than one box to stand on, and others of us can see without any.

In the official statement by The White House on Jan. 20, 2025, it was said that “nearly every Federal agency and entity submitted ‘Equity Action Plans’ to detail the ways that they have furthered DEI’s infiltration of the Federal Government ... That ends today. Americans deserve a

government committed to serving every person with equal dignity and respect, and to expending precious taxpayer resources only on making America great.”

Basic rights are not a winner-take-all game. Just because a group of people is receiving recognition, rights or opportunities does not mean their counterparts are suddenly out of luck. This means that the wolf in sheep’s clothing attempts at ‘leveling the playing field’ are actually direct actions aimed at putting certain groups below sea level. These groups include your friends, your family, your classmates, your coworkers and yourself.

The Trump administration is using the excuse of DEI elimination to live out the racist, homophobic, ableist, classist, misogynistic and xenophobic fantasy that has only inhabited the darkest corners of their wildest dreams until now.

Now, it is okay to hate people different from you out loud. Now, bullies are getting their way, and our democracy has been shoved in a locker following an atomic wedge. All because the tallest kid does not want anyone else to see.

Kayhe Duerson/Niner Times



Opinion: ‘Colorblindness’ did not work in Charlotte 80 years ago; it will not work now

Noah Hughey | Lead Writer

The Trump administration’s crusade against diversity, equity and inclusion policies has parroted a long-standing conservative talking point that they diminish the validity of individual merit.

“Illegal DEI and DEIA policies not only violate the text and spirit of our longstanding Federal civil-rights laws,” said one of the Jan. 21 executive orders. “They also undermine our national unity, as they deny, discredit, and undermine the traditional American values of hard work, excellence, and individual achievement in favor of an unlawful, corrosive, and pernicious identity-based spoils system.”

In North Carolina, lawmakers are also targeting DEI policies with this incredulous logic. House Bill 171 reads, “No State agency shall promote, support, fund, implement, or maintain workplace DEI programs, policies, or initiatives (...) other than through the use of merit-based hiring processes.”

The focus on individual achievements alone goes hand in hand with a broader notion of ‘colorblindness’—seeing past the race or ethnicity of job and scholarship applicants when considering them for a position.

In and of itself, this notion speaks to the unfounded anxiety of primarily white communities that evil cabals are intentionally hiring unqualified applicants to fulfill ‘racial quotas,’ a practice that is illegal in the United States and can be tried in court.

Moreover, they intentionally misunderstand the use of race consciousness in application policies, which vary from business to business, another fact they often skew. This is exemplified by the example set by the city of Charlotte in the era of the Civil Rights Movement. Its attempt to obscure the injustice and racial violence this country underwent through focusing on ‘economic development’ alone failed to redress biased policies against non-white citizens.

A history of turning a blind eye

Following the South’s bitter defeat at the end of the American Civil War, Black communities in North Carolina found new avenues for economic and political freedom, gaining traction across the state as a force to be reckoned with.

This resulted in a backlash of white supremacy that muzzled Black access to the state’s political machine by introducing constitutional amendments that allowed for racist poll taxes and literacy tests.

What the white supremacist order of North Carolina, and Charlotte in particular, failed to account for was the sheer amount of influence the Black vote had in the region. When people began to ‘vote with their feet,’ leaving for the north during the first Great Migration, anxiety set in for Charlotte’s ambitious business leaders.

Leaders have long hoped to turn Charlotte into a booming economic development. And the fact was if all of the city’s now free Black community left, this would simply never happen. Concessions had to be made, workers had to be hired, schools and neighborhoods had to be opened so

that their contributions to the local economy could produce the modern city we know today.

But the deep racism of the South remained. As Black men reentered state and local politics, the term ‘civility’ was employed by whites to give the impression that the two coalitions were working across the aisle to make progress. But this exaggerates the truth.

In reality, white leaders would give occasional concessions that did not threaten their superiority, while Black leaders pleaded for the basic necessities of citizenship in a so-called democracy.

These particular politics allowed a mirage of equal opportunity to seem to extend to black Charlotteans. Neighborhoods such as historic Brooklyn developed and, in some ways, even thrived. But the reality was that segregation was still the norm.

Neighborhoods like Brooklyn were so successful, in part, because Black citizens had little else to go as far as housing and business opportunities went. Whites hid away in segregated suburbs outside the city, such as Myers Park, keeping everyone else out of reach by newly developing highway networks.

Why colorblindness is never blind

This has been the reality of colorblindness before it even got the name. In theory, it presents a harmless idea of race-blind opportunities that measure each person for their individual merit.

But the fact is our society has long held that only white men are capable of producing individual merit, to begin with. The stain of this racism still exists in the way we treat people of color in our daily lives and collective cultural narratives.

Neighborhoods like Brooklyn were paved over in the name of ‘economic development.’ Rather than invest in the existing economic infrastruc-

ture that Charlotte’s displaced Black community had created, the city destroyed it.

In its place, often purely nominal opportunities were provided, leveraging the power back into the hands of predominantly white leaders, stunting the economic expanse and mobility of people of color in Charlotte.

Assumptions that the people who benefit from race-conscious policies are inherently less qualified than their white counterparts are racist. People who believe this pretend to know that there are simply less qualified applicants from Black and Brown talent pools. This is false.

Attempts at colorblindness, as they always have been, have more to do with protecting White people than promoting equality. They make empty references towards merit and achievement but pass around free handouts for people willing to dunk on DEI and promote ideas that imply people of color are less capable than their white counterparts.

Race-conscious hiring and admissions policies, in their diverse and fractured form, do what little they can to combat the lasting legacy of discrimination in cities like Charlotte.

Attempts to wash them away with ‘fairer’ colorblind policies have always led to more harm than good, decreasing the impact of a more diverse workforce’s views and experiences and increasing perceptions of bias towards people of color in the workplace.

Do not let the paranoid hysteria of a few Great Replacement theorists convince you that the talent and grit of Black and Brown people you see before your own eyes does not exist. People of color are just as capable as their white counterparts, and we should all be fighting to replicate the conditions that will allow that excellence to flourish.



Courtesy of Brooklyn Village

