


# NINERTIMES

Student-driven news since 1947

Feb. 20, 2024

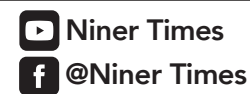
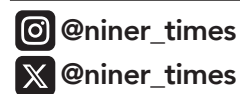


## Striking a chord

### How Will Washburn blends graduate school and music performance

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INSIDE: LIVING GUIDE 2024



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## Student-driven news since 1947

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

The Niner Times aims to provide accurate and fair news to the UNC Charlotte community. We cover campus happenings, news and events in the city of Charlotte and North Carolina and topics that are important to students. We publish written, photo and video content online ([ninentimes.com](http://ninentimes.com)), on social media and through our weekly email newsletter (sent every Tuesday at 9:30 am). We also produce a supplemental bi-weekly (every other week) in-print newspaper that hits stands on Tuesdays.

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# Changes in AI detection for submissions prompt new academic policies

Sofia DiStefano | Staff Writer

As of January 2024, Turnitin.com no longer uses AI detection to monitor submissions. UNC Charlotte professors have now incorporated new policies, including authenticator forms, into their syllabus to prevent student misuse of AI sites.

Britannica defines AI as the ability of a computer-controlled robot to perform tasks commonly associated with the intellectual processes characteristic of humans. Sites such as ChatGPT and OpenAI have trickled into numerous aspects of education and professional environments.

There are various opinions on the use of AI in the academic field.

“Overall, I have a positive view,” said Dr. Meaghan Rand, a professor in the Writing, Rhetoric & Digital Studies Department. “I think there are many opportunities to use AI in effective and intentional ways, and the more we learn about how it is developed, potential uses and its limitations, the more we can use it productively in academic and professional environments.”

As schools across the country have entered a more digital environment, the use of AI tools has increased.

“There has been an increase due to more availability of AI tools,” said Rand. “That said, since we do multiple drafts of projects with feedback in my classes, I don’t think overall it has been that much, and generally it has been used for brainstorming.”

Rand discussed the different methods students and educators are taking to regulate the use of AI.

“If students choose to use AI, they are asked to provide a reflection about when in their writing process they used it, how they used it, challenges and opportunities with it, and so on,” said Rand. “This helps me understand the rationale for its use. We also have class activities where we analyze AI writing pieces for audience, tone and accuracy so we can talk collectively about its uses.”

Artificial intelligence sites used by professionals, researchers and professors are available. Sites such as Grammarly or Packback are used in academic and professional settings.

Grammarly and Packback provide feedback for students on their writing, rather than just inserting a topic and having it written out by a chatbot.

Dr. Cliff Scott, a communication and organizational studies professor, brought another perspective on the use of AI to light.

“[AI in the classroom] inhibits your learning as a writer and generates writing that obviously has been written by a bot,” said Scott.

Scott said that using generated work is detectable by TAs, thus making it even easier for professors with years of experience to tell what is authentic writing from what is not.

“This is not just an ethical problem or controversy; this also has to do with one of the most important communication skills you can have in college,” said Scott.

Scott discusses that the use of AI has become a new issue for professors. He now requires that students sign a waiver form saying their work is original and not plagiarized.

“Be responsible to what students are tempted to do, talk about it and make policies on it,” said Scott.

On the other hand, Scott emphasizes an important aspect of technology use.

“Technology does not directly determine outcomes; what determines outcomes such

as learning is how the technology is used and implemented,” said Scott.

The Charlotte Center for Teaching and Learning website has a section on free AI detection tools like ZeroGPT, WinstonAI and CopyLeaks.

The University recommends that staff review the Academic Integrity policies and guidelines site before finalizing their course syllabus policies.



Students studying on the second floor of Atkins Library | Megan Bentley/Niner Times

## 70S DANCE

WEEKLY PLAYLIST FEB. 19



Kendall Maye | Staff Writer

The 1970s are known for iconic fashion, movies and hairstyles. Even more than that, this decade is most notable for its groovy music. Who says disco is dead? In this playlist, it is well and alive.

The Niner Times has created a ‘70s Dance Mix for students to enjoy whenever they feel the need for a break from their

responsibilities. Dancing is good for relieving stress, so the right soundtrack is crucial.

While it is important to work hard this semester, this mix is a reminder that it is okay to rest and have fun. So, kick off your shoes and “Let’s Dance” as you “Play That Funky Music” because you are about to be “Hooked on a Feeling.”

# UNC Charlotte's Helping Hand Project delivers hope through 3D prosthetics

Madison Hasley | Staff Writer

Students at UNC Charlotte are applying 3D printing technology through the Helping Hand Project to create personalized prosthetic hands for children with limb differences. These prosthetics are distributed to children in need through statewide organizations to help improve their quality of life.

The Helping Hand Project at UNC Charlotte operates as an independent branch of the organization, and they work on cases that are set up by the main body of the non-profit.

"These devices are aimed at providing aid to functionality, a sense of normalcy, and they are custom-made for the child specifically," said Aidan Restelli, the president of the Helping Hand Project at Charlotte. "Our goal is also to connect children and families with limb differences with family events to help create a support network. Our independence as an organization allows us to work directly with the families and operate within the overarching organization's vision."

Restelli discussed the process of how children in need connect with the organization.

"It starts with the child's family contacting our statewide organization at [helpinghandproject.org](http://helpinghandproject.org)," said Restelli. "From there, the child's case and many others get distributed to the different university branches of the Helping Hand Project such as NC State, UNC Chapel Hill, ECU, UNC Greensboro and UNC Charlotte."

Aidan further explains that upon receiving a case of a child in need, they carefully review the child's medical history and specific type of limb difference. This helps them select the most suitable device for the child and make adjustments.

"For example, our most recent case required us to adjust for an arm that had limited mobility past the shoulder," said Restelli. "Once we are finished adjusting, we then scale the arm to fit the child's measurements."

Aside from the technical aspect of engineering the prosthetic, the organization is also committed to considering style and visual design, including elements such as the child's favorite character, color or anything they prefer.

"For our last case, the child loved Spiderman, so we made a Spiderman-themed hand," said Restelli.

The Helping Hand Project not only creates prosthetic arms but also designs care packages for children and personally delivers them to their families.



The Helping Hand Project at UNC Charlotte operates as an independent branch of the larger organization. | Courtesy of UNC Charlotte's Helping Hands chapter

"After the arm has been finished, we then move on to the final step, which is creating a care package for the child. The care package consists of the arm itself, candy and a plush bear with a mini arm device fitted on its arm," said Restelli. "We then meet up with the family of the child, handing off the care package and checking that the final product fits well."

If the arm device breaks, the family can contact the organization and get the device scaled or fixed.

"As a club, over 50 devices have been created and delivered, and over 90 families connected that share a limb difference," said Resetelli.

This project has not only impacted families with limb differences but also the people who are lending a helping hand.

"I have personally seen the growth and development of this chapter of the Helping Hand Project at UNC Charlotte. This organization has provided me with a close-knit group of students with like-minded interests to interact and grow with," said Resetelli. "Interacting with children and families with limb differences has genuinely changed my perspective on recreational prosthetic limbs and biomedical engineering."

Family events are hosted multiple times a year, with the most recent one being held in the fall. These events provide children with limb

differences the opportunity to interact with each other while also serving as an outlet for parents to communicate with one another.

Along with planning events, the Helping Hand Project is in the process of improving the campus's environmental awareness and its organization.

"In order to do this, we plan on creating a machine that will recycle used plastic bottles into

filament material for 3D printing," said Restelli. "To coincide with this, we have plans to hold a recycling and bottle collection drive in which we will both collect these bottles and teach students about recycling. We hope to host more campus events to promote organizational growth."

To learn more about the Helping Hand Project at UNC Charlotte, students can find their chapter on Niner Engage or Instagram, @hhpuncc.

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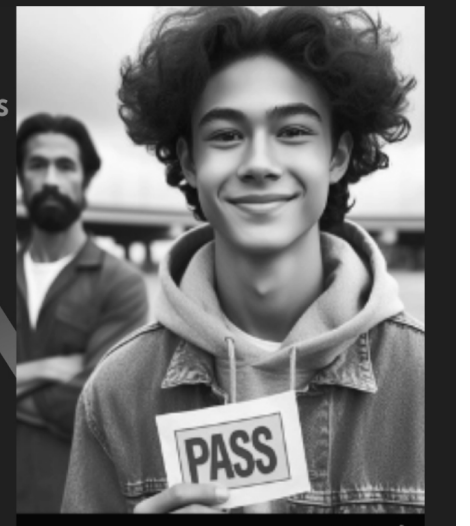
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# Charlotte Museum of History hosts its seventh annual African American Heritage Festival from Feb. 22 to 24

Sofia DiStefano | Staff Writer

The Charlotte Museum of History is hosting its seventh annual African American Heritage Festival on Saturday, Feb. 24, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. The festival is free of entry and will include performances, guest speakers, music, food trucks and other culturally focused events.

The main speaker for this year's festival is Joe McGill from the Slave Dwelling Project. McGill is from Charleston, S.C., and he is the founder and executive director.

According to Kendall McGeorge, the museum's education associate and team leader, he travels around the South going to former sights of enslavement and talks about topics such as urban slavery and its impact. The Slave Dwelling Project aims to raise awareness and educate others on the history and stories of enslaved ancestors. They give talks and presentations as well as organize overnight stays at sites that are connected with slavery.

The festival also aims to support Black-owned businesses by bringing them in for the event. Food vendors such as Hip Hop Smoothies, The Blasian Asian Way and Ms Didi's Caribbean Kitchen will be in attendance.

There will also be panel speakers at the festival, including the Charlotte Post, offering news from a Black perspective, and Rosenwald Schools, Charlotte-Mecklenburg's all-Black student schools.

Before the festival event on Feb. 24, there will be two other Black History Month kick-off events. On Thursday, Feb. 22, from 6 to 9 p.m., the documentary "A Blinding Truth" will be screened. It tells the story of Charlotte football star Jimmie Lee Kirkpatrick, who was involved in a Civil Rights lawsuit when he was not allowed to play in the 1965 Shrine Bowl All-Star game because he was black.

The following day, Feb. 23, a Caribbean Carnival will be open to the public from 6 to 9 p.m. for guests to indulge in music, food, performances and historical education about the African diaspora.

In a press release about the event, Terri L. White, the president and CEO of The Charlotte Museum of History, said that the theme of this year's festival is education and community.

"The museum celebrates the arrival of the historic Siloam School on its campus in September

2023," said White. "Once the building is restored later this year, the Siloam School will become a community resource and a center for history education, including exhibits about the 20th-century Black experience. The Siloam School will be the only Rosenwald-designed school in Mecklenburg County devoted to history programming."

According to McGeorge, the festival originated to bring people in Charlotte to the museum to celebrate African American culture and heritage.

"We are a site of former enslavement, so it is important that we talk about these kinds of things," said McGeorge. "It's something that people don't love talking about all the time, so it's just to [address] that."

The event is held every year on the last Saturday of February to acknowledge Black History Month.

The African American Heritage Festival is one of Charlotte's museums' most extensive pro-

grams, with around 1,100 people in attendance in 2023.

McGeorge works alongside two other members of the museum's education team, Nolan Dahm and Mea Agazio, to take charge and lead these events and bring in volunteers to help run them.

For further questions or if you are interested in volunteering, please visit the Charlotte Museum of History website.



Toby Miller/Niner Times

# Five Star Cheer brings confidence and expression on campus through Stomp N Shake cheer

Guadalupe Aguilar Sosa | Staff Writer

**F**ive Star Cheer, a performance and volunteer team, sets forth to bring an energizing crowd among students at UNC Charlotte. This year, they performed at student events like the National Panhellenic Council's Yard Show and partnered with 704 Shop for their latest clothing launch.

Xavea Crump, founder and president of the Five Star Cheerleading Team, established this team in 2021 to bring a new cheerleading style to UNC Charlotte, Stomp N Shake.

The cheerleading style Stomp N Shake originated in the North Carolina DMV area during the 1970s and contains historically Black chants emphasizing foot stomping to beats.

Crump began the team with five friends while living in Martin Hall. She aimed to create an organization that would build a positive space for those with Stomp N Shake talent while engaging with the Charlotte community.

"It's really important for me that my [members] feel confident. I think Stomp N Shake cheerleading brings out a lot of confidence. It's all about confidence," said Crump.

Crump takes the initiative to build confidence in her team, wanting her members to aim for bigger goals. She interacts with those living in the Charlotte area to inspire those who desire to showcase their talents.

"This year, we took on the yearlong initiative of education. So whenever we're volunteering, we're out in the community with schools. We've done a book fair, we've gone out and talked to kids [about] little cheers," said Crump.

Gaining attention from students and residents of Charlotte is the team's main audience goal. There are hardships, but Crump takes leadership for her team to have their efforts noticed.

"Especially because we're not the main cheer team. We're not cheering for football or basketball teams – we're cheering for the Niners as a whole and us as a whole. So, a lot of times, it's really empowering for my members. We have to grab our audience," said Crump.

Five Star Cheer had its icon showcase on Feb. 9, which allowed teams from all over the state to perform and showcase their talents in Charlotte.

"That's going to give people the opportunity from other college campuses who are similar to us Stomp N Shake teams at PWIs [Predominantly White Institutions] and other teams at the HBCUs [Historically Black Colleges and Universities] as well. They'll have the chance to come to one place and be united. That will



Five Star Cheer is UNC Charlotte's Stomp N Shake cheerleading team and was established in 2021. | Courtesy of Five Star Cheer

bring a lot of different people to Charlotte and the campus," said Crump.

When cheering, Crump's objective is to allow her members to feel empowered and express themselves.

"I love for them to put personality. We give them a free range to be creative. Whatever they think, whatever they want to come to life, I'm here to make it happen," said Crump.

The team performed during halftime at the Charlotte 49ers' basketball and football games in 2023. Crump saw many people interested in joining the Five Star Cheer team at these events.

"Basketball halftime was a really big one for us. That was kind of our first time where it was a different crowd, and it was pretty big for us. The football break was [also] huge for us, and we continue to keep growing," said Crump.

Five Star Cheer hosts spring tryouts on Feb. 22 for those wanting to join the team.

"Don't be afraid. We like to work with people and get them to the level [to perform]," said Crump.

Students can learn more about joining Five Star Cheer by following their Instagram, @fivestarcheerunc.



Denise Soriano/Niner Times

# Nova Literary-Arts Magazine's role as a shining star in Charlotte's art scene

Lauren Simendinger | Staff Writer

UNC Charlotte's Nova Literary-Arts Magazine celebrates its 54th year in 2024.

A curation of poems, prose and artwork, they have been nationally recognized and are a staple of Charlotte's art scene. Nova's 55th volume is expected to be published in mid-March.

First started in 1970 under the name Sanskrit, the magazine aims to feature the best of artistry. They take entries from worldwide, prioritizing works that invoke feeling.

"It's really important to us that we select pieces that make us feel something," said Grace Yochem, current Nova editor-in-chief. "I think art has to strike a chord with you. Whether that's, you know, the written word or the visual. My advice would be just to submit something that makes you proud. If it's important and special to you, then that is evident in the merits of the work itself."

Rich in diversity and culture, Nova shares the wide range of experiences found in Charlotte, bringing both awareness and these different experiences together in their magazine. However, there was a time when the magazine could have

been more representative of the culture.

When they were known as Sanskrit, the name often led people to believe it covered Hinduism and South-Asian culture, as Sanskrit is the Indo-Aryan language used in Hindu texts.

While the name was chosen when Charlotte's campus was much smaller and lacking in racial and cultural diversity, time revealed it was offensive. After many calls by fellow students to change the name, the Nova staff agreed this was the correct path forward.

"We want something that was not so culturally significant to one part of the globe. We wanted something that could be considered more global — inspiring to all types of people," said Kelly Gilbert, the 2021-2022 editor-in-chief who led the charge to rebrand.

At the time, Gilbert and the Nova editors held focus groups to get opinions from people across campus. This included faculty, students and the directors of marketing and communication at Charlotte and North Carolina State University.

Eventually, the name Nova was chosen. It was intended to honor the work and legacy of the

magazine while taking it in a new direction.

"My staff and I developed the Nova brand around the concept of stars crossing paths and sparking light in space, much like how art and literature enlighten us to new ideas," said Gilbert. "Individual stars take on new meaning when organized into constellations. Artists are pulling ideas from the past and regenerating old ideas into new star bodies. We developed this rebrand with the same intention that has guided our publication since 1970 — to give space for creative impulses to breathe."

As both Sanskrit and Nova, the magazine is well-received nationally. In 1987, Nova received its first Gold Crown Award from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association. In 2023, the publication won five College Media Association (CMA) awards, placing No. 2 in the Literary-Arts Magazine category. Nova also won three Peacemaker awards, placing No. 3 in Best Literature Magazine and Best Collegiate Design-Literary Magazine.

"I think that it's important to recognize that we are a team of people coming together to make a

final product that is not only seen by students on campus but our peers across the country and in the southeast," said Yochem. "It's also an honor to be recognized by the judges of CMA. It's really important to continue our history of being an award-winning magazine for future people who are involved with Nova, but also our creative communities on campus."

Above all else, Nova's notoriety comes from its awards and the work it puts out into the world.

"People should pick up a copy of Nova and dive into it because it's what's going on directly in Charlotte, but also it reflects a lot about what is going on in the world," said Alexander Beets, Nova's 2022-23 editor-in-chief. "Not necessarily explicitly, but in ways that intertwine the community very deeply and on a very emotional level. That's what the art and literature community is all about."

Updates from the Nova team, submission deadlines, and blog posts can be found on their Instagram page, @novauncc.

# Striking

## How Will Washburn blends graduate



Ronnie Taylor | Contributor

**G**et a Master's degree or play in a band? Why not both? While challenging, Will Washburn balances the two and incorporates his passion for music and writing on and off the stage.

Washburn is a first-year graduate student at UNC Charlotte and in a band called Big Backyard. Washburn plays guitar and does backup vocals for the band while being a full-time graduate student.

"I never want to stop doing any of the things that I'm doing, so I have to figure out how to do them all at the same time," said Washburn.

Washburn started Big Backyard in 2020 with Jackson Martin and Ben Scott, and together, the band released an EP titled "Music for Your Porch" with three songs. Not long after that, the band broke up, but they reunited in 2023 and pulled in Austin Kriss and Owen Buettner. Big Backyard has released a new single, "Durham," and plays a few live shows. While the band is performing again, Scott is focused on his personal life.

"This last year, Jack [Martin] was getting out of the big band he was in, and I didn't have anything I was doing except for going to grad school," said Washburn. "So, we were like, 'let's do Big Backyard again' because that was the most fun we'd ever had."

Washburn has a passion for art, learning and teaching, along with his love for music.

"I'm pursuing an English MA because creating art

imagine ever wanting to stop learning. If I can help others learn about things they love too, that's even better."

In graduate school, Washburn is studying English with a concentration in creative writing and a particular interest in poetry.

"As an English major, I feel like people don't really understand what we do," said Washburn. "I think people think of the English Department as pretentious people who are just sitting around feeling stuff. And, sometimes, that's definitely the case. But, we do a lot of work that I think is important and cool."

As a graduate student, Washburn is a graduate assistant tutor at the Writing Resources Center.

"Tutoring in the Writing Center has been hugely fulfilling for me," said Washburn. "It's so awesome just to help someone through their own learning and then watch them light up when they realize that they're capable of something that they didn't know that they could do. That's hugely fulfilling."

Despite his grad work, Washburn still finds the time to write.

"Grad school is insanely busy, so I wouldn't say I have a ton of free time, but I try," said Washburn. "When you're a writer, [it] is always [about] trying to push yourself to write more and more and more. There are times when you're really good at it, and you can get yourself writing all the time. And then there are times

“

**"[Big Backyard] is something that we do to hang out with our best friends and to get everyone dancing, but it's definitely not something that we try to tax ourselves with. [We're] just trying to have fun."**

- Will Washburn

and helping others see that they can be artists too gives me a strong sense of purpose," said Washburn. "I'm also just genuinely a huge nerd and really care about people being educated, which is something I've come to accept in the last year. I love learning and can't

when you just really don't have the energy. I definitely write best when I can get myself out of the house. And that's typically in the mornings."

Along with his school writing, Washburn writes lyrics for Big Backyard. While lyric writing and poetry

Washburn performs at The Milestone Club on Oct. 25. | Courtesy of Big Backyard/William Seaborn

# a chord ate school and music performance

seem very different, Washburn finds ways to let one writing form help him with the other.

“My focus on poetry in school has definitely made me a better lyric writer, in that I know some tricks to write more unexpected lines and generally have more

“With high school and undergrad, I would always try to get everything done as fast as I could and then do fun stuff. But in grad school, that’s not really an option,” Washburn said. “I know a lot of grad students will do the thing where they work until four in the

“

**“I think people think of the English Department as pretentious people who are just sitting around feeling stuff. And, sometimes, that’s definitely the case. But, we do a lot of work that I think is important and cool.”**

- Will Washburn

interesting ideas than I used to, but I think it’s more the other way around,” said Washburn. “I tend to insert a sense of rhythm into all of my poetry without really meaning to. It’s pretty much subliminal. I think poetry scares people because it’s inherently so intentional, but some aspects are totally gut-driven, and that part of my poetry is totally informed by heavy music.”

Despite the number of shows Big Backyard has performed since reuniting, they rarely rehearse together. However, Washburn, Martin and Kriss regularly meet to write and record new songs.

“The music thing has not been insanely busy. It was when we were in undergrad,” said Washburn. “It’s something that we do to hang out with our best friends and to get everyone dancing, but it’s definitely not something that we try to tax ourselves with. [We’re] just trying to have fun.”

Washburn has several goals with graduate school and the band. Once he earns his degree, he wants to be an English professor. With Big Backyard, he hopes to release a live recorded album and go on a tour.

“As far as the teaching stuff goes, [the goal is to] pretty much just stay on course, putting everything that I have into grad school and really trying to learn as much as I can. I mean, this is the most time I’ve ever spent on school,” said Washburn.

With the busyness of Washburn’s schedule, he has to find a balance.

morning on stuff [and] burn the midnight oil. I can’t, so I just really tried to be productive in the day so that at night I can hang out with my friends or my partner.”

While balancing graduate school and writing with Big Backyard is difficult, Washburn enjoys doing it. The art he creates through his poetry and lyric writing makes balancing the two worth it.

“I truly believe in art as one of the simple things that makes life worth living, so if I can write a poem that moves someone’s heart or show someone else that they can do the same, that’s when I feel like I’m doing something worthwhile and making the world a slightly brighter place,” said Washburn.

## DO YOU HAVE AN ARTICLE IDEA?

WHETHER IT IS NEWS, OPINION, SPORTS OR ARTS & CULTURE, THE NINER TIMES IS ALWAYS ACCEPTING ARTICLE IDEAS AND TOPICS!

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Washburn is a graduate assistant tutor at the Writing Resources Center. | Sunnya Hadavi/Niner Times

# CHECK THE NEXT ISSUE (3/12) FOR THE ANSWERS TO THIS WEEK'S CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU!

## NINER TIMES SUDOKU

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## 1/23 ISSUE ANSWERS

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1	7	3	8	5	9	6	4	2
8	5	6	2	3	4	9	7	1
2	4	9	6	7	1	3	5	8

## DID YOU KNOW?

COWS HAVE BEST FRIENDS, AND THEY GET STRESSED WHEN THEY ARE SEPARATED.

## NINER TIMES CROSSWORD

### Across

- The African American \_\_\_ Festival, one of Charlotte's museums' most extensive programs
- \_\_\_ Fearn, the new official Charlotte men's basketball coach
- Writing \_\_\_ Center, where students can get help with writing
- Joe \_\_\_, founder and executive director of the African American Heritage Festival
- Fought for civil and economic rights of African Americans
- Leonardo \_\_\_, celebrity notorious for dating women in their early twenties

### Down

- Will \_\_\_, backup vocalist and guitarist for indie emo band Big Backyard
- UNC Charlotte's literary arts magazine
- Cheerleading group that performed at National Panhellenic Council's Yard Show
- AI program that provides writing feedback
- Cheerleading style from the North Carolina DMV area
- Helping \_\_\_, an organization that creates prosthetics
- The original name of Nova Literary-Arts Magazine
- Dr. \_\_\_ Scott, who is against the use of AI technology on campus
- Robert and \_\_\_ Hayes Stadium, Charlotte baseball's home field

Crossword by Niner Times Editorial Board

# Charlotte Athletics officially names Aaron Fearne men's basketball head coach

Davis Cuffe | Asst. Sports Editor

Charlotte Athletics officially promoted Aaron Fearne to men's basketball head coach after his successful interim tenure. Fearne became the 14th official head coach after serving as interim head coach since June 7, 2023.

Through 24 games of the 2023-2024 season, Fearne has his 49ers at 17-8.

Charlotte has made notable accomplishments this year, including the program's first ranked win at home since 2010 and its first eight-game conference winning streak.

Fearne's debut season at Charlotte marks the strongest start by a first-year head coach since Bobby Lutz in 1998-99, spanning 23 games.

"It is an unbelievable honor to lead Charlotte basketball," said Fearne in a Feb. 12 statement. "I am thankful to the players and staff for believing in me last summer and wanting me as their head coach, and I am humbled that Mike [Hill], Chancellor [Sharon] Gaber and the Board of Trustees believe in me as well."

On Feb. 13, Fearne was made available to the media at a press conference alongside Charlotte Athletic Director Mike Hill.

## Excitement behind the hire

Through Fearne's 24 games as head coach, he has gained the support of a Charlotte fanbase desperate for a strong basketball program. This support is evidenced by the sold-out 2024 home game against East Carolina University (ECU). Fans camped outside Halton Arena and dubbed the area "Fearneville."

Hill echoed the support of the Charlotte fanbase in his opening comments in Fearne's introductory presser.

"Our fanbase is excited in what they see, and they should be; it's been a lot of fun to come to Halton Arena to watch us play," said Hill. "It just added up to this making complete and total sense; sometimes you don't outsmart yourself, and this is a decision that felt right and is right."

## Easy decision

Coach Fearne because interim head coach, Ron Sanchez, stepped down. Hill felt a lot of security in this decision.

"It instantly felt right when we made the decision last summer to make him the head coach, and obviously, it was at an interim basis at that point," said Hill.

While the move to make Fearne official happened on Feb. 11, Hill's realized that Fearne was the man much earlier.

"For me, the ECU game was an absolutely special moment for our program," said Hill. "I walked out of the building that day, and I was like, yeah, this is done."

## Looking forward

Keeping Fearne for the foreseeable future will add stability to Charlotte basketball. With Fearne

earning a five-year extension, players know who their coach will be for the foreseeable future.

"Having people out there in the community know what's gonna be ahead for the next five years and trying to build a support system to build our program is gonna be really important," said Fearne. "[The contract] is gonna help us recruit and retain."

Fearne has also proved himself to be a formidable coach. The 49ers have hovered around the top spot in the American Athletic Conference (AAC) this season but were initially projected to finish No. 13 out of 14 teams in the preseason.



Men's basketball Head Coach Aaron Fearne celebrates a Feb. 15 win over The University of Texas at San Antonio. | Chris Crew/Niner Times

# Column: Charlotte men's basketball looks to add to illustrious program lineage amid resurgence and NCAA tournament talk

Bryson Foster | Outreach Coordinator

The Charlotte men's basketball team boasts a record of 17-8 (could change) overall and 11-2 in American Athletic Conference (AAC) play, keeping them in the race for the regular season title. One word that describes the season for the 49ers is resurgence.

The 49ers have had quite the year going on an eight-game winning streak, beating No. 17 Florida Atlantic University (FAU) to record the first win over a ranked team since 2013 and selling out Halton Arena against rival East Carolina University. Recently, the team dropped the interim tag on Aaron Fearn, making him the 14th head coach in program history.

The light finally returned to the program as the team has its best shot to make the NCAA tournament since the 2004-05 season.

## Program history

Many may not know or have forgotten that the 49ers have had a history of proving the doubters wrong.

The first season for the program came in 1965-66, where they finished 6-17 and 4-7 in conference play.

The program jumped into the national spotlight in 1975-76 under Head Coach Lee Rose and center Cedric "Cornbread" Maxwell. That year, Charlotte made the National Invitational Tournament (NIT), falling to the University of Kentucky in the championship game.

The following season (1976-77), Charlotte posted a 28-5 record, earning a bid to the NCAA tournament. Rose's upstart group did not disappoint as they rattled off three wins against No. 17 Central Michigan University, No. 5 Syracuse University and the No. 1 University of Michigan Wolverines to make the Final Four.

In the national semifinal, the 49er's magic ran out as they fell to national champion Marquette University 51-49.

After three years with the 49ers, Rose left for Purdue University, but his legacy with the program stayed. At Charlotte, he finished with a record of 72-18 while going 40-2 at home. Rose started his 27-year collegiate career at Charlotte, and his impact was felt in the NBA, holding coaching positions for five franchises.

Rose paved the way for other great Charlotte coaches like Jeff Mullins and Bobby Lutz.

Mullins recorded 183 wins, with Charlotte helping the program earn five postseason appearances. After his time at Charlotte, Mullins passed the reins to his assistant Bobby Lutz, who surpassed his all-time wins record with 218. Lutz led Charlotte to five 20-win seasons with three Conference USA (C-USA) titles and eight postseason appearances.

Like his coach, Boston Celtics NBA Finals

MVP and Charlotte Athletics Hall of Fame inductee Maxwell paved the way for many players to wear the Green and White. Henry Williams, DeMarco Johnson, Jon Davis, Jarvis Lang, Byron Dinkins, Rodney White and Lew Massey graced the Halton halls because of Maxwell.

This season is another example of overcoming the odds, and this team has a chance to add to the program's illustrious history.

## A look at the season

After a run to claim the College Basketball Invitational crown, the program's first postseason title, former Head Coach Ron Sanchez returned to the University of Virginia as their associate head coach under Tony Bennett.

Through the portal, the 49ers lost Aly Khalifa and Brice Williams to Brigham Young University and the University of Nebraska, respectively.



Men's basketball Head Coach Aaron Fearn rallies his players during a game against The University of Texas at San Antonio. | Chris Crews/Niner Times

After a solid end to the 2022-23 season, Charlotte was entering another time of uncertainty.

As the season started on Monday, Nov. 6, it was unknown what lay before the team, but a win over the University of Maine calmed those worries for a time. But once AAC play started, the team was in a sticky situation with a 6-7 overall record after dropping their first conference game to Southern Methodist University, 66-54.

The turning point was Saturday, Jan. 6, when the 49ers welcomed top 25 opponent FAU to Charlotte.

A year before the contest, Charlotte found themselves in the same spot, needing a win against the Owls. The 49ers led by one going into the half but squandered the lead in the second, falling to a Final Four-bound FAU squad.

On Jan. 6, the 49ers took those lessons learned and did not make the same mistakes. The game was back-and-forth, but two free throws from redshirt junior guard Lu'Cye Patterson with two seconds remaining sealed the 70-68 win, changing the season's fortunes.

Charlotte has won 11 of the last 12 and is tied for No. 2 in the AAC. The 49er's grind-it-out pace has put them into contention to get a conference tournament bye and an auto-bid to the NCAA tournament.

What's the difference this season?

The 49ers are averaging more points than a year ago but are shooting worse from three as they've decreased from 38% to 32%.

The team has improved on rebounding the ball but still ranks No. 302 in the nation for rebounds per game. Charlotte forces 10 steals per game, but they average nine turnovers.

The squad's success might not be seen in the stat sheet but rather in the leadership provided by the players and the coaching staff.

### Fearne fanatics

After Sanchez's sudden departure, Fearne was named the interim head coach on June 15, 2023. After a solid season start, he got the nod on Feb. 12 to officially become the head coach.

Athletic Director Mike Hill said Fearne was the best man for the job.

"In our first year in the AAC, he has our team competing for a league championship and has completely re-energized our fan base. The players believe in him, and so do we. This is a great day for Niner Nation," said Hill.

Fearne has held multiple positions with the 49ers for the last five seasons. He has shown his ability to recruit as he brought Khalifa into the fold, and more recently, he was responsible for bringing former Virginia junior forward Igor Miličić Jr. to the Queen City.

The fans have shown approval of Fearne's performance. Before the contest against ECU, the Gold Mine, UNC Charlotte's official

student section, camped outside of Halton. The campsite was coined as "Fearneville" to honor the program's leading man.

The players expressed love for their coach, and he energized them while having fans intrigued by the product on the court.

Fearne said that adding to the program's lineage means a lot to him.

"It is an unbelievable honor to lead Charlotte basketball. I am thankful to the players and staff for believing in me last summer and wanting me as their head coach," said Fearne.

### Top performers

Basketball is a team sport, which is true with Charlotte. But if you had to pick out a name that has elevated the 49ers, it is Patterson.

Patterson, a Missouri State University transfer, is in his second season with Charlotte. He is averaging a team-high 14.6 points, 3.7 rebounds and 2.5 assists on 43% shooting from the field.

Since Jan. 16, Patterson averages 18 points per game and has garnered the moniker of "Takeover Kye." He can hit the big shots and court vision allow him to make winning plays.

You can not forget about Patterson's partner in crime, Miličić, whose length and athleticism make him a pain for the opposition. He is putting up 12.9 points, 8.4 rebounds and 1.9 assists while shooting 37.4% from deep.

The paint belongs to Washington State

transfer and redshirt sophomore center Dishon Jackson. He has scored over 15 points in the last three contests while defending shots at an impressive rate.

Players like Nik Graves, Isaiah Folkes, Robert Braswell IV, Jackson Threadgill, Dean Reiber and Daylen Berry provide a strong core. They are give-and-take while playing unselfish basketball.

### Looking ahead

Talk of the NCAA tournament is exciting for fans and students who want to root for their team in the big dance. The American does have at-large bids and is stronger than the C-USA, so Charlotte could make it.

Sadly, it seems the 49ers might have to win the AAC tournament to make the field. The team has a lackluster non-conference record with losses to Liberty University, the University of Central Florida, Davidson College and the University of Richmond, which hurt their resume.

The second half of the season has been different, and if Charlotte keeps winning, they may have a chance at an at-large.

What lies ahead are matchups with the University of Memphis, a perennial tournament team, and the University of South Florida for the regular season title. It is not impossible or out of the question for the 49ers to make the tournament, but work must be done starting Wednesday, Feb. 21.



Senior Charlotte guard Jackson Threadgill (12) shoots a three against The University of Texas at San Antonio. | Chris Crews/Niner Times

# CLT

## CHARLOTTE 49ERS

### SCOREBOARD

### RECENT GAMES

FEB. 11- FEB. 18

### MEN'S BASKETBALL

Feb. 11: Charlotte 73, Temple 70

Feb. 15: Charlotte 79, UTSA 70

Feb. 18: Charlotte 72, Wichita State 61

### WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Feb. 14: Charlotte 65, Memphis 56

Feb. 18: Charlotte, SMU

### SOFTBALL

Feb. 11: Texas Tech 2, Charlotte 1

Feb. 16: Charlotte 9, Canisius 4

Feb. 16: Boston University 5, Charlotte 0

Feb. 17: Charlotte 7, Canisius 0

Feb. 17: Boston University 2, Charlotte 1

### BASEBALL

Feb. 16: Virginia Tech 10, Charlotte 0

Feb. 17: Virginia Tech 10, Charlotte 5

Feb. 18: Charlotte 10, Virginia Tech 5

### WOMEN'S TENNIS

Feb. 17: Charlotte 4, Boston University 0

Feb. 17: Charlotte 4, Western Carolina 0

### MEN'S TENNIS

Feb. 11: Charlotte 5, UAB 2

Feb. 16: Charlotte 5, South Carolina State 2

### OVERALL STANDINGS

Men's basketball: 17-8, 11-2

Women's basketball: 14-11, 7-6

Men's tennis: 5-2, 0-0

Women's tennis: 7-4, 0-0

Softball: 5-4

# Season Preview: A retooled Charlotte baseball team looking to carry momentum into 2024 AAC debut

Sam Perry | Staff Writer

Charlotte baseball succeeded at the end of the 2023 season behind the rallying cry of “a chip and a chair,” with Head Coach Robert Woodard using the saying to motivate his team to go on and win the Conference-USA tournament. Now, as the 2024 season gears up, the 49ers have a new chair at a different table in the American Athletic Conference (AAC).

“It’s a great reference in terms of everybody’s 0-0, so when you know we’ve got more chips per se than we did when we got down to our last game in the conference tournament last year, but so does everybody else,” said Woodard. “Every other team in the country is sitting at the table with chips in front of them, and it’s again a matter of us controlling the things we can control.”

## Heavy expectations

Charlotte has major expectations in this new season as they were voted No. 2 in the AAC Preseason Coaches Poll. Despite being new to

the conference, the team has commanded the respect of fellow teams as they head into the season and have personal faith in where they can go.

“There’s a lot of signs that point towards this group wanting to be great, not good,” said Woodard.

## Newcomer no more

Senior infielder Brandon Stahlman, coming off a solid first year with the 49ers last year, has now stepped into a new role as a leader, transitioning from third base to shortstop to man the middle of the team’s defense.

“When he’s [Stahlman] at shortstop, he’s kinda like a middle linebacker in football; he’s our Luke Kuechly,” said Woodard. “He’s the guy that, when he’s in the middle of the field, he’s gonna make sure everybody around him knows what they need to know is where they’re supposed to be, and just gives us a better chance to be successful.”

His improvements were felt throughout the program as Stahlman was selected No. 1 overall in the Fall World Series draft.

“It speaks a lot about the hard work I came in, and I’ve done, and I’m still doing,” said Stahlman. “When I got here, I was with a new team, but I wanted to give it my all every day and take it day by day. A lot of the stuff was new to me, but I think we see that with the new guys here, too.”

## New faces ready to leave their mark

Twenty-eight new players joined Charlotte’s roster coming into the season, and a few have stood out to be ready to make an immediate impact. Junior infielder Juan Correa from the College of Central Florida, junior infielder Noah Furcht from Kirkwood Community College and freshman Johnny Sutryk have all impressed the program in their short time with the 49ers.

Correa is a power hitter who showed out in fall ball, with the team hitting the long ball well,

all while playing a strong defensive first base. In 2023, with the College of Central Florida, he hit 22 home runs and won the JUCO World Series MVP.

Furcht brings a dynamic offensive skill set with his combination of contact and speed and should be a dangerous weapon in the lineup for 2024.

Sutryk is a very physical player who has worked hard in the offseason, impressing the upperclassmen on the team with his work ethic as a freshman.

## Veterans set to lead the pitching staff

The pitching staff is looking to shake up to be led by some key returners looking to take big steps in the 2024 season in redshirt sophomore right-handed pitcher Miles Langhorne, senior right-handed pitcher Cameron Hansen and redshirt senior right-handed pitcher Tony Rossi.

Langhorne is set for a massive breakout season, getting the starting nod on opening day and getting the chance to establish himself as the ace of the staff.

“[Langhorne] is as talented as any pitcher I’ve coached,” said Woodard. “The growth and maturity that he’s shown in his year and a half of being here. I don’t know if there are many guys who have made bigger jumps on that facet.”

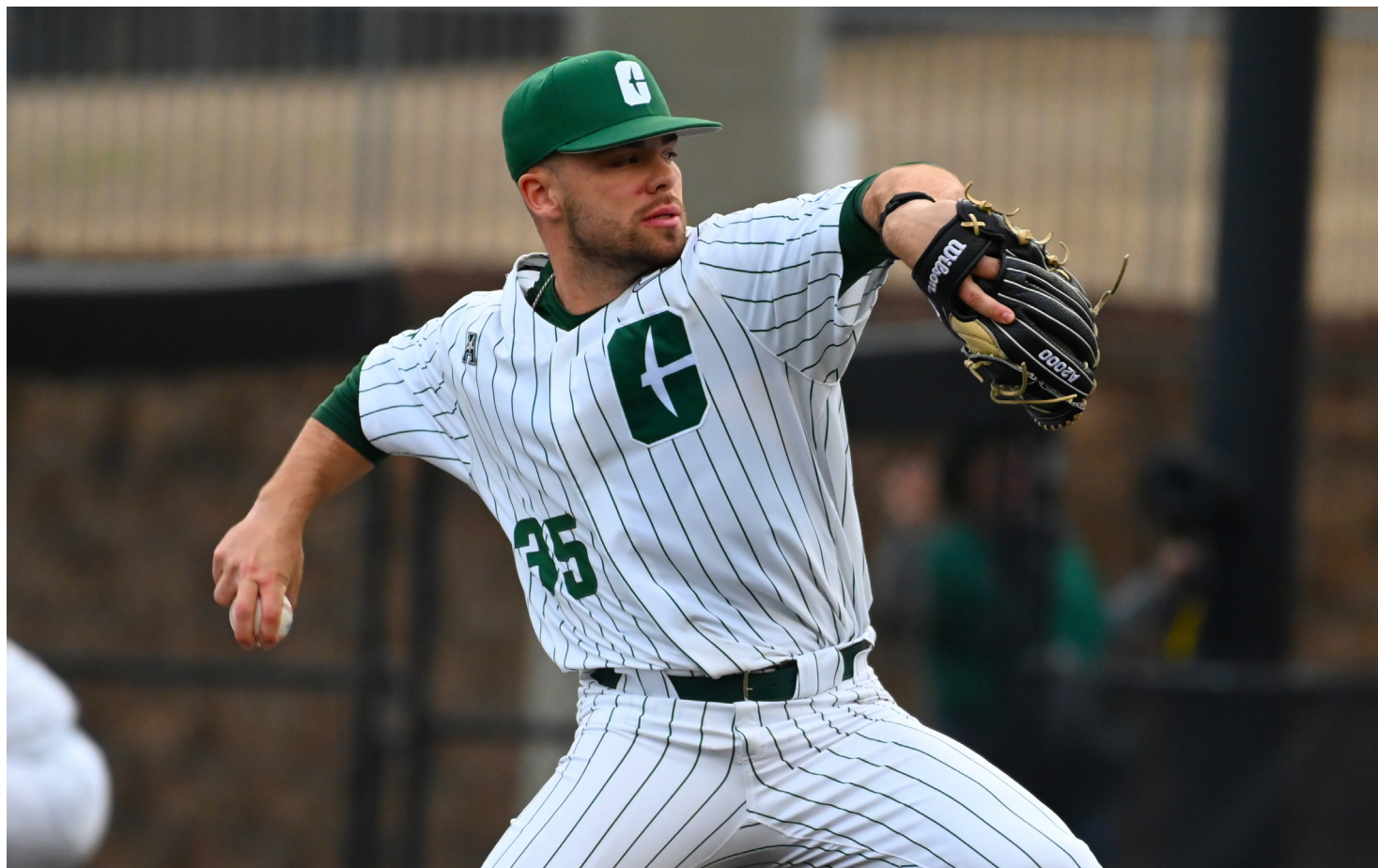
Hansen has some high expectations heading into the season as he was named to the 2024 Preseason All-Conference Team in the AAC.

Out of the bullpen, Rossi looks to be the stabilizing piece in relief after missing all of 2023 due to injury; the most utilized pitcher from the team in 2022 is back and ready to contribute in the new season.

“Great teams are led by players,” said Woodard. “Cam [Hansen] is one of the pitchers for us that gives us the chance to be great. Because he’s gonna be the voice, the leader in that pitching staff along with Tony Rossi and some other guys, those are going to be the guys that really set the tone for the team and how we go about it.”

## Home at the Hayes

In the 2024 season, Charlotte will play 31 home games at their on-campus stadium of Robert and Mariam Hayes Stadium, giving them plenty of chances to show off in front of the Gold Mine, with only 20 games scheduled to be played in hostile territory on the season.



Charlotte baseball’s right-handed pitcher Trevor Anibal throws a pitch during a game against Virginia Tech on Feb. 16. | Chris Crews/Niner Times

# Black History Month and the message that activists spread cannot be overlooked

Ruhshona Soledjonova & Jaden Hartfield | Opinion Editor & Staff Writer

Centering Black art, literature and culture must continue to be a part of America's future and history. Not only should educators help reinforce the Black experience, but society must continuously acknowledge that racism is prevalent today.

Although Black history and experience should be celebrated year-round, Black History Month allows a designated space in the year to expand and deepen society's consciousness.

Other holidays throughout the year, such as Martin Luther King Jr.'s (MLK) Day on Jan. 15, are recognized for the influence of MLK and his collective contributions to American history.

"His [MLK's] imprint is much larger than simply the rights for African Americans; it tackles civil and economic rights as well," said Dr. Eddy Souffrant, department chair of Africana Studies at UNC Charlotte.

Souffrant explained that the purpose of Black History Month and MLK Day is more than just

a simplified message of "children holding hands and walking together"; it is a call to further education about racial injustice and inequality that still haunts this society.

Although many recognize MLK for his "I Have a Dream" speech, which calls for equity and racial justice, his other works must be acknowledged for their contributions and effect towards bettering America. For instance, the "I've Been to the Mountaintop" final speech by MLK, before his death explores the future progression of civil rights, the struggle to work towards economic justice, and the collective work it will take to get to freedom.

Individual and collective education on Black literature is crucial. Society cannot expand in education growth if we only look at the most popular or known works of literature.

"Education should be beyond Black History Month. There is something that we tend to overlook, and it is that the African American experi-

ence in the world is fundamental, at least in the Western part, because not knowing that history is a detriment for any person's education," said Souffrant.

Further contributions of Black activists evoke a crucial perspective on all aspects of human life.

The Western world continues to embrace the African American experience while still failing to acknowledge the greater issue at hand: a lack of unity. The existence of Black History Month and Martin Luther King's message continues to remind the Western world of that issue.

## Today's impact

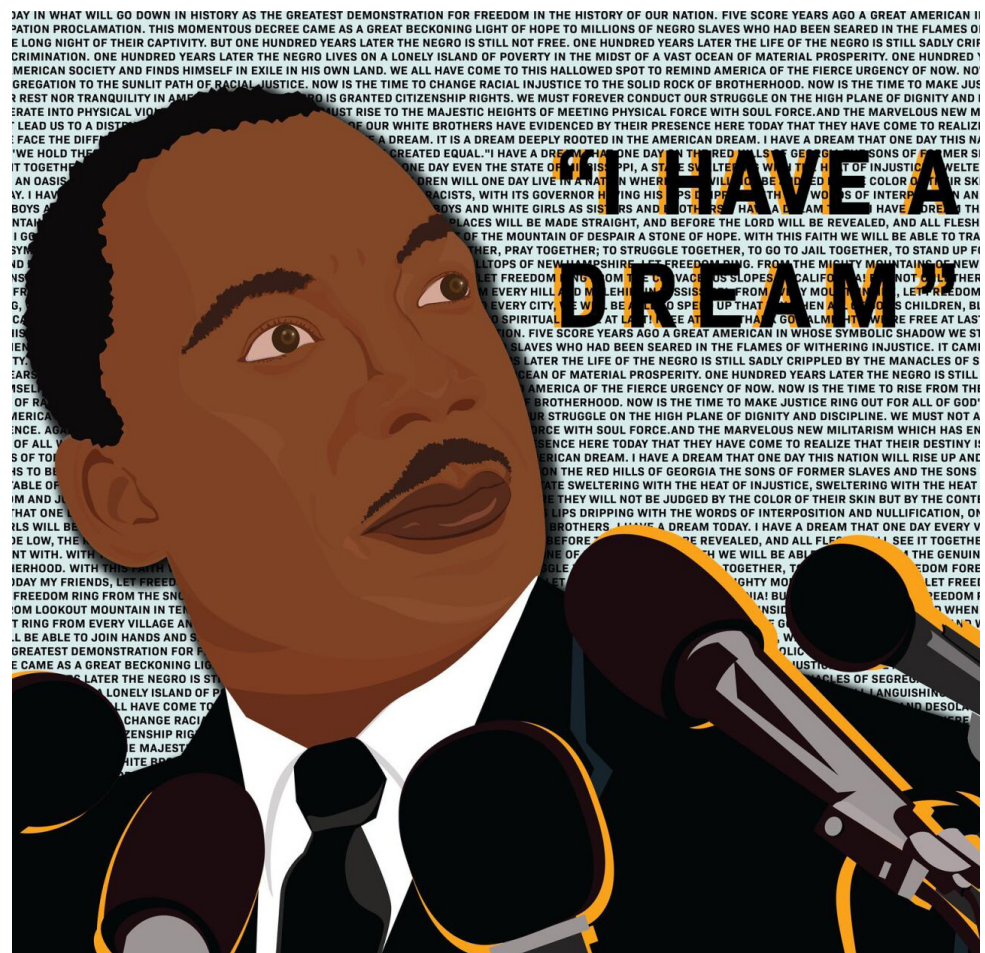
Black celebrities and activists find inspiration in the existence of Black History Month and Martin Luther King's message to continue the fight for that unity. Rihanna is one of the celebrities who fights for unity, as seen in her 51st NAACP Image Awards acceptance speech.

"I'm lucky I was able to start the Clara Lionel Foundation in 2012, and if there's anything that I've learned, it's that we can only fix this world together. We can't do it divided. I cannot emphasize that enough," said Rihanna.

She compares the establishment of her climate justice initiative foundation to the unity needed to make American society and the entire world a better place. She emphasizes that these issues will not change overnight and cannot be done alone.

"We can't let the desensitization seep in. The 'if it's your problem, then it's not mine.' It's a woman problem. It's a Black people problem. It's a poor people problem," said Rihanna.

Rihanna also emphasizes that if individuals of other races, sexes and religions wish to live properly alongside African Americans, then the issues they face are also their own.



Nam Phon/Niner Times

**TURAS**

RECEPTION DATE AND TIME:  
**THURSDAY,  
FEBRUARY 15, 2024  
5-7 P.M.**

ARTIST:  
**SARAH ASHLEIGH VOJNOVICH**

DURATION AND PLACE:  
**FEBRUARY 4-23, 2024  
PMSU ART GALLERY**

**POPP MARTIN STUDENT UNION**

# The media's obsession with celebrity relationships negatively affects women in relationships

Veda Bireddy | Staff Writer

The media portrays celebrity relationships in black and white. There is always someone who is in the wrong and someone who is in the right. Unfortunately, women are usually given the short end of the stick.

While men can get away with dating vastly younger women and changing partners often, women are shamed for dating more than one person for as long as they are in the public eye. Another facet of this issue is the competition between women, perpetuated by fans pitting women against each other.

For example, Leonardo DiCaprio is known for dating women in their early twenties; however, other than jokes, he receives little to no serious backlash. On the other hand, Taylor Swift has received a lot of backlash from her exes, both while in the relationship and afterward.

This translates into the general population either judging famous people for their relationship choices or paying no mind but still being affected by the competitive aspect. On the side of judging celebrity relationships, people who spread hate have most likely not formed their own opinions about the matter and are taking in what the media puts out.

While it is okay to base an opinion on that of another, it is not okay to blindly believe what is being published or leaked. Part of this culture is being self-aware and understanding that famous people are still people.

However, there are people who do not care about famous people or their affairs but are still affected by the media. Relationships in the media are never portrayed as calm, but the general public strives to have calm relationships.

Even in 'real' life, women are being pitted against each other; with the rise of social media, it is seen as a badge of honor to entertain multiple people at once.

It is seen as a way to put people down when not attracting as many men as others.

Women also face the impact of misogyny in other areas, such as their physical appearance and how it correlates with their age. This leads to the general population of women gaining insecurities about showing signs of aging.

The media pushes a narrative of women being or needing to be sex objects with zero imperfections; women in real life do not meet the criteria to be the media's so-called 'perfect' woman.

If one were to ignore social media and pop culture in general, there might be a chance that the insecurities would not occur. However, beau-

ty standards are so deeply ingrained within our society that they are pushed at every corner.

If one does not meet the standard, they are deemed unworthy of love. Critical thinking needs to be applied to the way we as a society interact with and internalize media content as well.

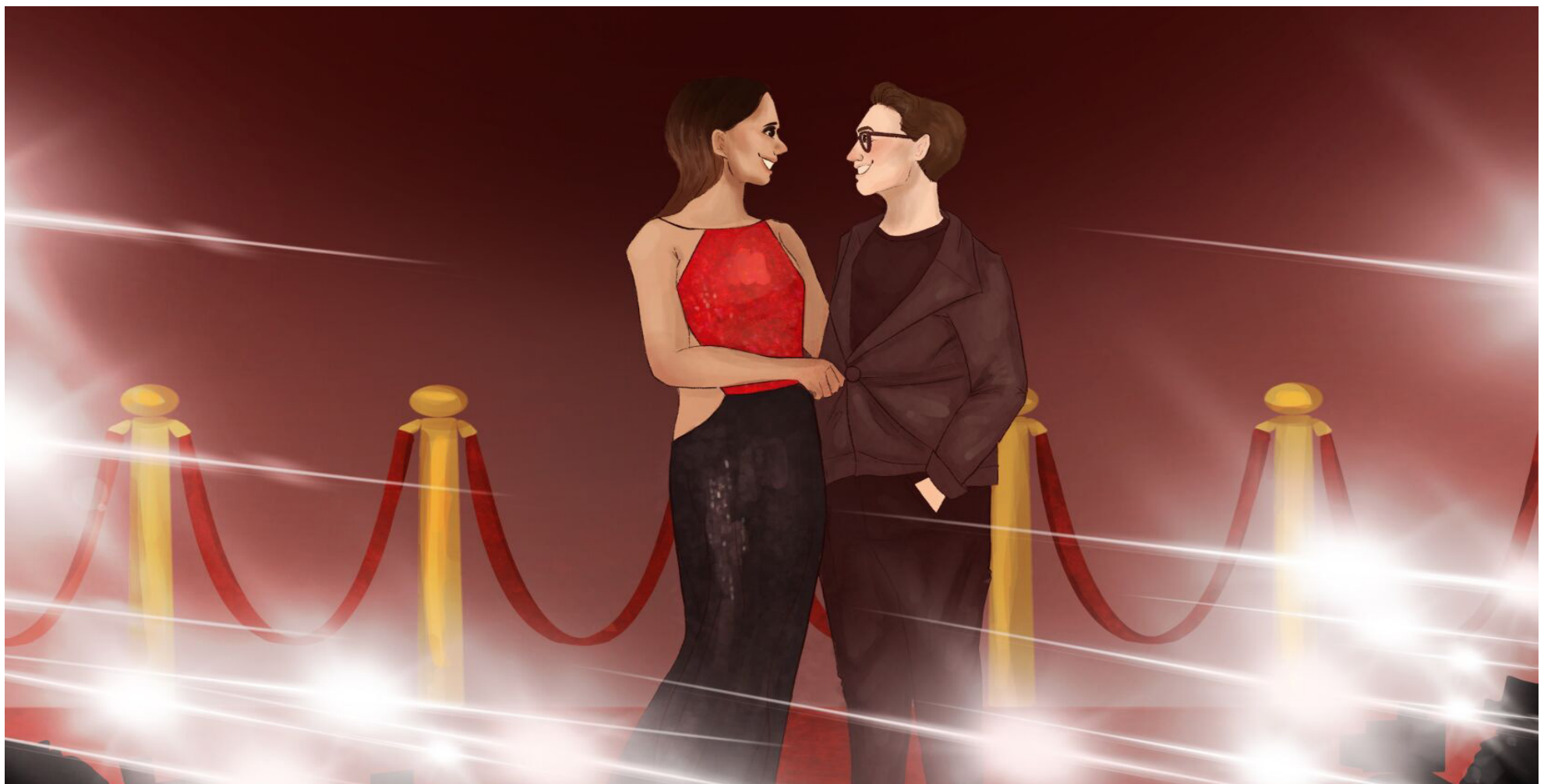
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Ava Weaver/Niner Times