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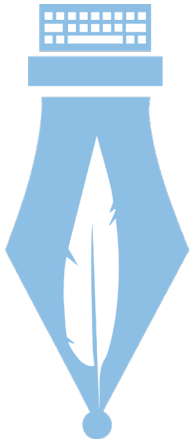
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University Editor reflects on 2025 coverage



DTH/CONNOR RUESCH

DTH University Editor Regan Butler poses for a portrait at the DTH office on Franklin Street on Aug. 14.

By Regan Butler
University Editor

At UNC, 2025 brought what any year would: paradigm-shifting change. That truth is not unique to these 365 days; the University holds a storied history of groundbreaking evolution at the hands of those who call it home.

But something about 2025 was exceptionally tectonic. President Donald Trump’s inauguration in January marked the beginning of seismic federal policy shifts that quickly trickled down to UNC, fundamentally changing higher education.

UNC faculty and students felt a rug-pull as research funding was slashed, leaving pivotal work in limbo. All federal dollars soon felt scarce, and belt-tightening at UNC to the tune of \$70 million ensued; future out-of-state students saw cuts to their aid, and gradual staff restructuring left uncertainty simmering.

University administration obeyed. It removed a pro-Palestinian mural after Trump’s expanded definition of antisemitism left his desk; it revoked the Black Student Movement’s 52-year-long usage of the Upendo Lounge upon federal anti-DEI guidance; it promised compliance after six student visas were revoked and immigration enforcement surged.

Students, watching Capitol Hill unfold before them, made their voices heard. Campus activism engaged nationwide conversations, from academic freedom to the War in Gaza.

Still, UNC moved onward. Artificial intelligence seeped into the University’s classrooms and operations. The campus shifted around us as new structures rose, preparing for an ever-growing student body.

This year, University Desk reporters were reminded of our duty to make sense of the ground shifting under us — and to equip the UNC community with the information it needs to stay standing. We hope our Year in Review stories put this time at UNC into perspective.

X: @reganxbutler

ACTION

Federal changes struck, UNC students stepped up

Campus organizers combat SNAP cuts, DEI rollbacks

By Maria Sullivan
Senior Writer

As the first anniversary of President Donald Trump’s second inauguration approaches, UNC students are continuing to grapple with the onslaught of federal policy changes that characterized their year. “There’s generally been two types of attacks that we’ve seen,” Lucia Paulsen said. “One where it’s like, ‘We really know this is coming,’ and then one where it’s like ‘We expected this, but this is a surprise.’”

Netra Parikh and Paulsen, the co-presidents of UNC’s Campus Y, lead the epicenter of organized activism on campus. Paulsen said that there are different ways to respond to federal policy attacks.

Since taking office, the Trump administration has slashed billions of dollars in federal research funding at universities across the country.

In light of these cuts hitting UNC research, the Campus Y established its Social Justice Research Journal, which aims to fill the gaps where funding has been lost and allow students to continue their work, with a chance to have it published.

The journal was planned at the beginning of Parikh and Paulsen’s co-presidency, as they anticipated the escalation of research cuts during Trump’s presidency.

However, the Campus Y’s advocacy work this year wasn’t always planned so far in advance. When Professor Dwayne Dixon was



DTH FILE/VIYADA SOUKTHAVONE

Campus Y co-presidents Netra Parikh and Lucia Paulsen pose for a portrait at Campus Y on Aug. 17.

placed on administrative leave for his alleged affiliation with an ‘anti-racist, anti-fascist’ organization and his alleged advocacy of political violence, the Campus Y jumped into an urgent crisis-response — rallying other student organizations to oppose the act and releasing a statement in support of Dixon.

Trump’s domestic policy bill, which was signed into law on July 4, implemented new restrictions on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Many community members also faced difficulties accessing SNAP benefits due to the historic 43-day-long government shutdown.

In recent months, the Campus Y collected groceries for those facing SNAP cuts, filling a pantry that gets restocked every three days.

UNC students are also currently

feeling the increased emphasis on immigration enforcement, with United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol officers recently making their way into the Triangle. Carolina Mendez, the co-president of Students United for Immigrant Equality at UNC, said that even though there haven’t been official ICE detentions in Chapel Hill and only sightings of border patrol officers, there is still a sense of fear permeating the community.

SUIE works to empower and inform the immigrant community, and in light of recent ICE presence across North Carolina, the organization is working to provide resources for impacted populations. SUIE recently sent out a faculty-wide email to professors on behalf of students who may be impacted by ICE raids, explaining why

some students may be absent or less engaged in their studies than usual.

Mendez said SUIE is still passing out federal agent protocol cards, which they made during the first Trump administration.

SUIE is hosting a donation drive until Dec. 10 to collect food items for those who may not feel comfortable leaving their homes amid increased immigration enforcement. “It’s important to be wary and cautious of new federal guidelines, but also to not let it paralyze you,” Adam Sherif, the president of UNC’s Black Student Movement, said.

The Upendo Lounge, which was a place for Black students to gather, has been under the “co-ownership” of BSM since 1973. But their access was terminated in September due to UNC’s implementation of federal policy guidelines.

A memo released by the U.S. attorney general specifically identified BIPOC study lounges as being “facially” restrictive. The memo aimed to ensure that federally funded entities were not involved in “discriminatory practices, including those labeled as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (“DEI”) programs.”

Sherif said BSM’s role BSM is to advocate for UNC’s Black community. He said losing the Upendo Lounge was a huge hit for Black students at UNC, eliminating a place that facilitated connection.

“It’s good to know that I’m fighting for something that really does have so much meaning and history and importance,” Sherif said.

X: @mariaesullivan

ADMINISTRATION

UNC’s academic freedom balancing act spurs questions

Experts say free speech is different and should be handled as such

By Caleb Herrera
Assistant University Editor

In 2025, UNC walked a tight line between protecting free speech and asserting administrative authority. Whether in classrooms, on campus walls or in student activism, debates over what should be allowed — and who gets to decide — defined a key era for the University’s position in academic freedom and free expression conversations.

During a Faculty Governance Council meeting on Oct. 3, Chancellor Lee Roberts described the University’s approach to striking a balance in its support of free speech and expression as an “imperfect process.”

In late September, this balance was put to the test when Asian and Middle Eastern Studies professor Dwayne Dixon was placed on administrative leave following “reports of alleged advocacy of politically motivated violence.” Dixon was previously affiliated with the left-wing community defense formation Redneck Revolt. He was reinstated four days later after a University investigation determined he posed no threat to campus safety.

Graham Piro, faculty legal defense fund fellow for the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, said the University’s response reflects a broader national trend of faculty facing punishment for speech outside of the classroom.

Piro said that the organization is seeing more universities point to broader security concerns to justify inquiries into speech that is otherwise protected and that universities should conduct detailed reviews of the expression being contested.

Wade Maki, chair of the UNC System Faculty Assembly, said that there is a crucial distinction to be made between academic freedom and free expression. He added that academic freedom specifically protects the teaching and research faculty conduct within their scholarly fields.

While he said that Dixon’s placement on leave would not be classified as an academic freedom issue, but rather an issue of freedom of association, a separate campus controversy — The Oversight Project’s request of UNC course syllabi — could fall under that classification.

In July, the conservative watchdog organization submitted a public records request for resources and syllabi from 74 UNC courses. It sought out DEI-specific keywords.

Maki said that the request doesn’t violate academic freedom, but what follows it potentially could.

“It’s not this release of the syllabi, it’s what pressures to change or badger, let’s just say, harass people to get them to change how they teach will we see,” he said.

Another major controversy, the removal and destruction of the student-created pro-Palestinian mural in Hanes Art Center, raised additional questions about how the University handles free expression



DTH DESIGN/SARAH FENWICK

Photos courtesy of Benjamin Eggleston, Chichi Zhu, Michael Melton and Adobe Stock.

on campus. The mural was concealed overnight prior to the first day of fall classes, after orders from chancellor’s office.

Piro said these kinds of decisions require consistent communication to avoid the appearance of political favoritism.

“A university does not need to share the faculty’s views, but we also urge faculty, our universities to practice what is called ‘institutional neutrality,’ meaning that they do not take a stance on the issue at hand or the politics at hand, but they instead affirm the faculty members rights to express themselves or to research, teach or operate under the auspices of academic freedom,” he said.

Dixon said the mural’s removal echoed framing he believes contributed to his own suspension,

adding that people may find art uncomfortable but it still needs space to exist.

Dixon said that while he personally hasn’t felt a chilling effect since his return to campus, he knows others may view these developments differently.

“We need more openness and we need less fear,” he said. “And with those two things, I think collectively, we can arrive at some really amazing possibilities, but if we are overcome by fear and a reticence to engage, then we all retreat into silence, and when we retreat into silence, we’re more alone and the more alone we are, the more vulnerable but also the more impoverished we are intellectually.”

X: @calebherrera_

STUDENT ORGANIZING

Almost every 2025 campus protest opposed federal actions

Advocacy touched on War in Gaza, academic freedom, immigration

By Kayla Bradshaw
Staff Writer

and Jackson Auchincloss
Staff Writer

Young people attend university to learn, grow and begin their journey through adulthood, making their campuses both energetic marketplaces of ideas and engaging forums for expressing them.

Political shifts and division felt across the United States emanated on campuses throughout the country. From First Amendment protections to environmental awareness to demands for disclosure and divestment, UNC acted as a hub for activism this year.

The Daily Tar Heel reviewed and analyzed the 15 on-campus protests that occurred at UNC over the course of 2025.

2025 started with major national policy shifts following the inauguration of President Donald Trump into his second term — including federal diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility rollbacks, mass deportation efforts and environmental action withdrawal.

One of the most prominent issues brought to the forefront of student activism during this transition was academic freedom. Student demonstrations advocating for academic freedom made up approximately 26 percent of the total protests that occurred at UNC in 2025.

These events rejected the Trump administration’s Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education, demanded protections for protesting rights and freedom

of speech and worked to reinstate UNC professor Dwayne Dixon after he was placed on administrative leave for his alleged advocacy of political violence.

One organization that pushed for awareness and action surrounding these controversies was Sunrise UNC. In April, the group held a “Protest is Legal” rally in response to the University’s new protest rules that took effect on April 1. The policies prohibit camping on UNC property without written approval and blocking the entrances to University buildings. It also clarifies that student protestors can be punished for activities at other campuses and allows UNC Police to share information with law enforcement from other campuses.

In November, Sunrise UNC teamed up with 17 different campus organizations and called upon the University to reject Trump’s compact, which they said would further limit students’ rights to free speech on campus. Shortly thereafter, Chancellor Lee Roberts made the announcement that UNC would not sign on to the compact.

Kiersten Hackman, Sunrise UNC’s communications director, said that this year, the group has been doing the work of two organizations — fighting for both environmental issues and free speech. Looking forward, Hackman said the group wants to focus on their core cause: environmental issues.

“That’s something that we’re going to try to fix going into 2026, is building an overarching organization for student or student organizers on campus that can focus on that mission, and then we can focus specifically on climate work on campus,” Hackman said.

In 2024, Sunrisc UNC held demonstrations demanding environmental actions, including

rallies calling for the University to enact a Green New Deal and an end to UNC’s use of coal for power. This year, the group continued to fight for environmental equity, leading two demonstrations related to the cause; one against the continued use of coal, the other coinciding with the first anniversary of Hurricane Helene.

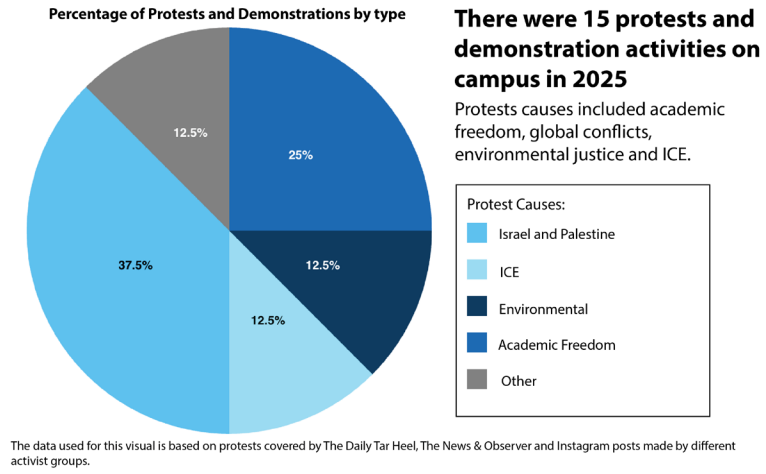
Another concern that has recently made its way onto campus is the Trump administration’s unprecedented use of U.S. Customs and Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents to deport undocumented immigrants in the United States. While only 13 percent of protests on campus were held in response to these events, many student activist organizations have continued to call on UNC administration to prevent agents from entering campus.

The two demonstrations — one urging the University to refuse to comply with Border Patrol, the other expressing solidarity with those detained by the agency — occurred before agents arrived in the Triangle on Nov. 18.

Christine Huang, a UNC senior and the president of TransparUNCy, a political education group that joined in the call to close the University to Border Patrol, said she had felt an atmosphere of fear and paranoia since the agency’s arrival close to home.

“So we’re going to constantly try our best to make things accessible, try to make the University politics transparent and collaborate with students to try to get material change on campus in ways that University admin has been resistant to,” she said.

A recurring topic of student activism that, like in 2024, made a strong showing in 2025, was pro-Palestinian advocacy. By itself, it made up 33 percent of all activism on campus — even more if one specific protest combining pro-



DTH DATA/DIYA JOSHI

Palestinian and anti-deportation interests is considered.

An especially significant time for this group of organizers was during the week of Oct. 6, when three separate demonstrations were held. The importance of that week for those supporting Palestinian statehood was emphasized, with that Tuesday falling on Oct. 7, the second anniversary of the Hamas-led attacks on Israel.

October saw more than just pro-Palestinian demonstrations. FlowForward, an organization focused on advocating for menstrual equity at the University, held its first protest on Oct. 14. Organizers marched across campus to demand the University add \$1 to student fees to fund free menstrual products in campus bathrooms.

This year, the University saw an increase in the diversity of causes students protested for. In 2024, 84 percent of total protests were in response to the War in Gaza, while this year, similar demonstrations only accounted for 33 percent of overall protests and had substantially smaller attendance.

X: @dailytarheel

PROFESSOR PROMOTIONS

Tenure: Hotly debated by trustees, heralded as necessary by faculty

This year, disputes over the merit of the appointment surged

By Alice Scott
Assistant University Editor

In June, the UNC Board of Trustees granted tenure to 33 faculty members — more than any other month this year. The mass promotion approval occurred via written ballot during a month when trustees were not scheduled to meet.

The vote occurred after the BOT delayed voting on tenure appointments for multiple months.

The situation was hailed as highly unusual and concerning by many community members and higher education experts. Letters urging the BOT to vote on the delayed appointments were sent by the UNC chapter of the American Association of University Professors and several faculty members.

Emails obtained by The Daily Tar Heel over the summer revealed correspondence between trustees, with some expressing opposition to tenure.

In the months that followed, trustees engaged in multiple open session discussions about tenure — first during their July meeting and again in September, when interim Provost Jim Dean presented a detailed report on tenure to the BOT that synthesized trustees’ top questions about the promotion.

The report and these discussions revealed the evolving landscape of tenure at UNC, which could include heightened enrollment considerations when making tenure-track hires, prioritizing



DTH DESIGN/LORELAI PALMER

teaching needs and increased involvement from the BOT.

How faculty receive tenure at UNC

Faculty who receive tenure at UNC are either approved for the promotion at hire or, more often, after they spend around seven years as a tenure-track faculty member. Tenure-track faculty make up about half of UNC’s faculty — the rest being fixed term.

Typically around the end of their sixth year at UNC, these faculty members put together a file called a dossier that includes their curriculum vitae, their teaching record, outside recommenders, letters and other materials related to their work and research that they submit for review.

The tenure applications are then reviewed by the faculty member’s department, the dean of their school or college and one of two review boards.

Applications are then sent to be reviewed by UNC’s Committee on Appointments, Promotions, and Tenure, which is made up of 12 elected faculty members. The tenure case is then reviewed by the provost, the chancellor and finally the BOT.

“The tenure review process at UNC-Chapel Hill is among the most rigorous in the nation,” LeRhonda Manigault-Bryant, chair of the APT committee, wrote in an email statement to The DTH.

Dean said faculty who receive tenure at hire go through the same process and level of review as tenure-track faculty, simply without having spent seven years at the University. He said these faculty often already held tenure at their previous institutions.

Since 2022, only 79 of the 243 faculty members awarded tenure received it at hire.

What tenure allows faculty to do

Once faculty receive tenure, their contract at the University is extended indefinitely. Mark Criley, the senior program officer in the AAUP’s Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance said this promotion is important because it provides job security, professional independence and ensures faculty’s rights to academic freedom.

Dean said some people misunderstand the indefinite contract that tenure provides as meaning that tenured faculty can’t be fired.

All tenured faculty receive a post-tenure review on a five-year cycle that involves peer-led review committees and evaluations across research, teaching and service.

The University has dismissed three tenured faculty members for continued poor performance between the 2023 and 2025 school years.

Dean said both firings and low performance ratings for tenured faculty are “relatively rare” because UNC’s hiring and tenure review process is so selective.

The future of tenure at UNC

Following the BOT’s delays in voting on tenure, some faculty and community members expressed concern the delays could indicate the elimination or overhaul of tenure at UNC.

However, Dean said he believes the University will continue to offer tenure for the foreseeable future. He said abolishing tenure would make UNC “absolutely uncompetitive for the people that make a university great.”

Although Dean said tenure isn’t likely to be eliminated at UNC, the University has implemented a

new financial review process that will guide the hiring strategy for tenure-track faculty.

The process will involve the review of enrollment trends, with heightened scrutiny for tenure-track hires in academic areas of flat or declining enrollment. This review process began in the last few months Dean said, following collaboration between the BOT.

Additionally the percentage of faculty who are tenured at UNC could increase or decrease in the future, depending on the priorities of the provost, chancellor and BOT.

One of those priorities includes the University’s current focus on enrollment growth, which increases teaching needs. Fixed-term professors typically teach more credit hours than tenured or tenure-track faculty.

Dean said the current BOT is also interested in having a larger role in the tenure review process.

“I’ve had a lot of conversations with the Board,” Dean said. “One of our conversations has been, ‘We don’t want to be just a rubber stamp. We want to actually have a real role in the proceedings.’”

Trustee Mary Kotis wrote in a statement to The DTH that he wants to ensure receiving tenure remains a rigorous process and that the promotion is a mark of exceptional performance.

“This is not about eliminating tenure,” Kotis wrote. “It’s about building a stronger, modernized version of it — a ‘Tenure 2.0’ that protects academic freedom while ensuring accountability, excellence, and competitiveness for the people of North Carolina.”

X: @alice_scottt

SHIFTING GROUND

Growing enrollment meant evolving campus infrastructure in 2025

Changing student needs call for construction, renovation, demolition

By Sajni Patel
Senior Writer

and Jordan Andreasen
Staff Writer

In 2025, UNC began confronting the physical realities of its long-term planned student enrollment growth. As the University welcomed its largest-ever incoming class and continues efforts towards a 10-year initiative to grow enrollment by 5,000 students, it underwent a wave of renovations, construction and planning to keep pace.

In an email statement to The Daily Tar Heel, UNC Media Relations wrote that these efforts correlate with student needs and the long-term vision for UNC’s campus.

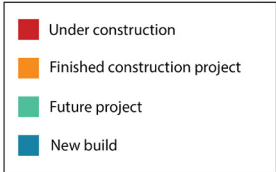
Student housing became a clear indicator of the limits of increasing enrollment. Carolina Housing has both required new spaces and designated residence halls that previously housed mixed classes as first-year buildings.

This year’s infrastructure-related Carolina Housing projects aimed at addressing growing enrollment include:

- The reopening of Avery Residence Hall, which underwent a \$32 million renovation to add central

UNC’s campus has seen multiple construction projects in 2025

Some changes on campus are being made to accommodate increasing enrollment.



HVAC, ADA-compliant bedrooms and restrooms and a new elevator.

- The renovations of 56 rooms for athletes on the women’s basketball and football teams who live in Ram Village 1, 3 and 5. The updates included repainting, new flooring and furniture and appliance updates.
- The May announcement of a new 700-bed residence hall, ‘New Residence Hall One,’ that will replace Jackson Hall — the current home to the Office of Undergraduate Admissions — which is slated to begin next summer and conclude in fall 2028. Executive Director of Carolina Housing Allan Blattner wrote in

a statement to The DTH that the Housing Master Plan has been updated to prioritize updating aging facilities, expanding capacity and aligning project timelines with “academic-year needs.”

Academic spaces also reflected the impact of enrollment growth, as renovations focused on sustainability and preparing for larger class sizes.

In August, Bingham Hall reopened for classes after a year of undergoing sustainability and accessibility developments. The renovation process included adding air conditioning, redesigning the building’s storm windows and original terrazzo floors and installing

motion-sensored technology at entrances and exits.

The University has also committed to other major projects in efforts to expand academic capacity:

- The new Steven D. Bell Hall building at the Kenan-Flagler Business School, set to open officially in the spring, will feature a 40-seat outdoor tiered teaching space and a four-story inner atrium. The upgrades are estimated to let the school double its undergraduate class size.
- A new 110,000-square-foot building will replace the west wing of Carrington Hall to expand simulation and clinical learning spaces for the School of Nursing, with completion expected in December 2026.
- The Caldwell Hall Accessibility Project aims to add an accessible entry with a semi-enclosed tower, new stairwell, elevator and an accessible restroom on the first floor with estimated completion in April 2026.

Enrollment growth and evolving student needs have also reshaped campus life and logistics. Dining updates included new spots in the Student Union and Chase Dining Hall, kiosk ordering options at multiple locations, and expanded seating across campus.

Lenoir Dining Hall also received updates including rearranged seating and additional bar seating to maximize space. There are also

plans to replace the downward escalator with a new staircase.

The University has also committed to a series of other developments, including:

- UNC’s South Building is undergoing a roof replacement project in which new copper panels will be installed, preventing additional water damage and deterioration to the building’s infrastructure.
- The Porthole Alley redevelopment is set to create 120,000 square feet of retail and office space, along with a new home for the Office of Undergraduate Admissions and the UNC Visitors Center.
- The demolition of the remaining 23 Odum Village apartment units to allow for development of future projects, including the proposed Campus South Hub, a mixed-use area for research, entrepreneurship, graduate student housing and other amenities.
- The renovation of Fetzer Hall in efforts to create a modern Student Recreation & Well-Being Center, with plans to expand and upgrade strength, cardio and functional training spaces. The project also includes plans to implement courts, multipurpose and aquatic areas to meet current campus needs.

X: @dailytarheel

ADMINISTRATION

UNC sees significant leadership turnover, grapples with the ‘why’

Revolving door of admin leaves the University in limbo

By Delphine Liu
Staff Writer

UNC has seen significant leadership turnover across administrative roles this year, namely in academics and enrollment. Some faculty and students worry about how these transitions are affecting the continuity of the University’s academics and mission.

Several deans stepped down from their positions last spring, including Wesley Burks of the School of Medicine, Martin Brinkley of the School of Law and Angela Kashuba of the Eshelman School of Pharmacy. This fall, David Decosimo was fired from his associate deanship in the School of Civic Life and Leadership, where he remains an associate professor.

Two provosts have also left their roles: former Provost Chris Clemens, who stepped down in May, and former Vice Provost of Enrollment Rachelle Feldman, who stepped down in late November.

Clemens resigned amidst controversies with SCiLL and has since sued the University and the Board of Trustees for violating N.C. Open Meetings Law and N.C. Public Records Law. In his lawsuit, he alleged that he was pushed out by “University leadership” due to his discussion of the Board’s closed session tenure meeting with deans concerned about stalled appointments.

Feldman told University Communications and Marketing that she is simply ready to “pass the baton” and spend more time traveling and with family.

“I think in some situations it’s a ‘You can resign or be terminated’ type of situation,” Beth Moracco, the chair of the faculty, said. “I think in other [situations] it really has become untenable to serve in that particular leadership position, and the individual just makes the

decision that they would rather go back to their faculty role, or retire or pursue a different type of position.”

UNC Media Relations did not respond to The Daily Tar Heel’s request for comment by the time of publication.

UNC isn’t the only university seeing a trend in prominent administrators stepping down. Between 2020 and 2024, higher education institutions across the U.S. saw increased voluntary turnover among faculty and staff, according to a study conducted by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources.

Former UNC Chancellor Holden Thorp explained his outlook on why leadership turnover occurs to UNC Media Hub in 2021. He said that when there is a new executive, half of the team turns over — either because they intended to retire or have been exhausted by controversy.

Chancellor Lee Roberts is now about a year and a half into his tenure at UNC. He was elected to his role by the UNC System Board of Governors in August of 2024, after serving as interim chancellor since December 2023.

Moracco said that, particularly, in the last five years, top university leaders have been holding office for a shorter amount of time.

“I think as the leaders of institutions of higher education, chancellors or university presidents are in a particularly difficult role because they have such a multitude of stakeholders,” she said.

Moracco said that the composition of these stakeholder groups has changed, and that now, there are more groups demanding that their needs or perspectives be taken into account.

“It is a difficult position to be in, and now we’re in circumstances where there are threats to federal funding, to academic freedom and some of the core tenets of higher education are under threat,” she said. “And so I think that puts university presidents or chancellors in an even more precarious position.”

Liam Kiley, the chair of the committee on rules and the judiciary for the Undergraduate Senate, said

that in his Student Government experience, he has learned that people generally see those in an administration as extensions of the top executive. Kiley said that Roberts is relatively unpopular, and he thinks this leads many to associate those grievances with UNC’s administration as a whole — making his role even more precarious.

The BOT and the BOG can also have an influence on University leadership turnover, Nayan Bala, the committee on finance and appropriations chair for the Undergraduate Senate, said.

“It really makes me think that [former Chancellor Kevin Guskiewicz] was kind of pushed out for not adhering to the agenda of the BOT, and that Chancellor Roberts was a much better kind of fit for their agenda,” Bala said.

For those in student groups, increased turnover can make advocating for their organizations more difficult.

Bala is also the co-president of Flow Forward, a reproductive health organization on campus. She said that when advocating for the organization’s goals, she spent a significant amount of time communicating with former Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Amy Johnson. But in November, UNC announced that Johnson would transition away from that role, which she held for five years, into a senior advisory position.

Bala said after this change, she had to restart all of her advocacy efforts. She said a pattern of turnover “leads to a lot of inefficiencies in students actually being represented to admin.”

“It’s really up to students to call administration out on their lack of representation for the students and, at the end of the day, we have these universities for students,” Bala said. “I think that’s one thing I find really frustrating, is that these people are just kind of coming in and coming out — and it just makes me think that they’re in it for their own narrowly constructed self-interest a lot of the time.”

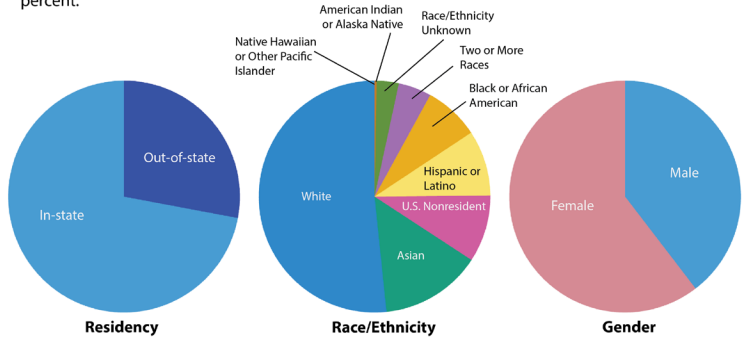
X: @dailytarheel

BRIEF: Student Demographics

Campus remains composed of majority in-state students

2025 UNC Student Demographics

72 percent of students are in-state. White students make up 51.6 percent of the student body. Asian students are the second largest group at 14.1 percent. A majority of students are female at 60.4 percent.



DTH DATA/KATHERINE MCRAE

In total, UNC currently hosts 22,007 undergraduate students, and 79.8 percent of them are from North Carolina.

Of the total undergraduate population, 18.4 percent came from rural areas of North Carolina, while 61.4 percent came from the state’s metropolitan areas.

The other 20.2 percent of undergraduates traveled, at least across state lines, to attend UNC — most prominently from New York, New Jersey and California. Every state in the United States is represented by the undergraduate population at UNC this year, including the one student from South Dakota.

Not all of this 20.2 percent comes from the United States, though, as 2,231 undergraduate students had their passports stamped to attend UNC. 114 total countries are represented in the undergraduate population, and almost half of these international students come from China and India.

Black, Hispanic and Latino students make up most of UNC’s underrepresented minorities, comprising 6.5 percent and 9.8 percent of the student body, respectively. American Indians and Alaska Natives, who make up 0.3

percent of the student body, and biracial individuals, who make up five percent, are also classified as underrepresented minorities.

16.6 percent of the University is Asian and 51 percent is white. This is the University’s smallest proportion of white students in the last decade, dropping by about one percent annually, while the percentages of Hispanic and Latino, Asian and international students rose.

Gender, on the other hand, has remained consistent over the past five years, with 60.6 percent of the University population being female, and 39.4 percent male.

Similarly, federal Pell Grant recipient numbers have fluctuated little in recent history, with just over 21 percent of current undergraduate students being recipients of the need-based aid.

UNC added 6,821 first-year and transfer students this fall, with 5,076 coming from North Carolina. This is a substantial jump from last year’s incoming class of 5,720.

This increase primarily stems from the uptick in out-of-state students, which rose by over 700 in comparison to last year.

— Justin Jackson, Staff Writer

DISCOURSE

UNC integrated artificial intelligence into classrooms, operations in 2025

The University eagerly adopted the rapidly developing tech

By Mariah Temple
Staff Writer

UNC and its community members have made numerous recent efforts to pioneer the incorporation of artificial intelligence into higher education. Instructors are experimenting with weaving the technology into their curriculum, two schools are set to merge with a focus on AI and the University’s incoming provost desires to put the technology at the “forefront” of the University.

At the helm of this shift toward AI usage is Chancellor Lee Roberts, who has repeatedly emphasized his desire to position the University as a leader in AI and become an “AI university.” In an August Q&A with The Daily Tar Heel, Roberts said he hopes to do so by “responding to and taking advantage of” the challenges AI presents in research, instruction and operations.

In administration, a new vice provost

Following the lead of corporate industries, universities across the country are making moves to integrate AI not only in operational efficiency, but also through exploring its use in the classroom to prepare students for an evolving job market.

Jeffrey Bardzell is UNC’s newly appointed — and inaugural — vice provost of AI. Bardzell, who was formerly the dean of the School of Information and Library Science, stepped into his new role after the University announced the merger of SILS and The School of Data Science and Society into a new school.

Bardzell said the goal of the new, unnamed school is to keep pace with AI and put the University in a position to push the technology rather than chase it. He added that this shift towards AI implementation in academia will

require participation from students, faculty and staff.

Bardzell’s hope for the new school is that its students will have not only the technological skill to address complex issues, but also the ethical orientation and commitment to democracy that SILS instills.

After the merger’s public announcement, a SILS faculty member wrote to The DTH that Roberts pushed for a new “School of AI” despite lacking a “cogent idea” as to what it would entail and teach.

Bardzell said he thinks the “School of AI” nickname is a misnomer that alienates some students, faculty and donors.

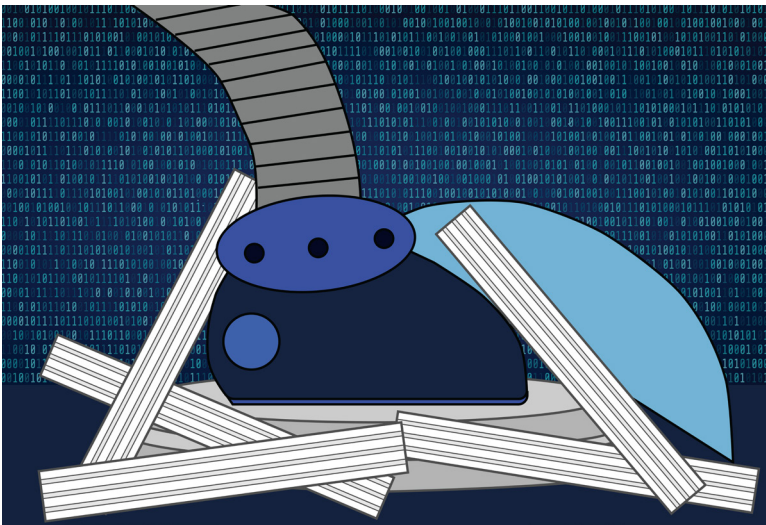
“I think that narrows its scope, whereas I actually think that what’s happening is going to broaden its scope,” he said.

On campus, AI-centric spaces and policies

Though the new school is set to be “operational” by July 2026, 2025 has been marked by several other steps to inch UNC closer and closer to becoming an AI institution. That broader vision is taking shape as the University rolls out several initiatives, accelerating its investment in the technology and sees additional AI-oriented leadership shifts.

At the start of the fall semester, University Libraries opened its AI Studio in Davis Library as a designated space for students to develop AI literacy. In September, UNC Board of Trustees member Marty Kotis suggested using AI to scan internal files and syllabi for remaining diversity, equity and inclusion elements after the UNC System’s elimination of DEI policies.

Most recently, in a Nov. 12 University-wide email, newly announced Provost Magnus Egerstedt — a robotics researcher and the current engineering dean at the University of California at Irvine — was quoted as identifying AI among his primary focuses as he steps into his role this March.



DTH DESIGN/LORELAI PALMER

However, members of the UNC community hold differing perspectives on the speed and extent of the University’s use of AI.

The lack of a standardized AI policy at UNC has led some to call the University’s recent moves overzealous. Others underscore a need to prepare students for this new world.

Scott Geier, a professor in the Hussman School of Journalism and Media and founder of UNC’s new AI festival ‘Converge-Con,’ said he believes UNC is at the forefront of AI ideologically — an area of leadership he considers more important than applied sciences.

The University has a statement with guiding principles on how individual departments can construct AI policies, without implementing standardized University-wide rules, Director of Student Conduct Jenni Spangenberg said. She said the flexibility of this decentralized approach allows faculty the academic freedom to decide how they can best meet their own course objectives.

Spangenberg said academic dishonesty concerning AI use is classified as when a student doesn’t follow the professor’s guidelines in order to achieve the course’s goals.

“The Student Code of Conduct process does allow for us to work

with students if they weren’t reading something correctly and just overlooked what the expectations were, or if there are time management challenges that they’re experiencing,” she said.

In the classroom, faculty opinions vary

Geier said his position on AI in academia is that it cannot be used to shortcut thinking. For three years, his class policy on AI has remained: if a student uses it to simply complete work for them, they will fail the assignment.

Deb Aikat, another Hussman professor, said UNC should stop talking about the potential of AI and follow its peer institutions in providing students with full-scale, paid access to AI tools.

“What I am really, really concerned about, is that instead of AI policy, AI procedures, AI positions at UNC, we are getting a lot of philosophical mumbo-jumbo,” he said.

Aikat said that since AI is here to stay, its curricular use should not be discouraged, as he worries that students may not be prepared for the actual application of AI tools that job industries will demand.

On the other hand, Adam O’Fallon Price, a professor in the

creative writing program, said he believes the University’s push for AI is primarily financially motivated, citing substantial funding and grants that departments adopting it receive from the technology sector.

He noted that there are well-meaning voices behind the acceleration of AI, but said the idea of its integration into traditional learning is misguided, calling it a “cheating machine” for students.

“Good versions of journalism, good versions of business are creative — perhaps not as wholly creative as creative writing, but they are creative pursuits at their best,” Price said. “And I think when you introduce AI into those pursuits, you get a bad product. You get something that is same-y and dull.”

Geier said he is worried that if educational institutions “throw money” at implementing AI without focusing on sharpening fundamental human skills like critical thinking, creativity, and communication, then they could be led astray.

“I’m not saying we should completely pump the brakes on AI adoption, or we should not do it at all,” he said. “I just think we need to have a more guarded, well-reasoned approach to it.”

Conversely, Price said that the responsible, ethical response would be for UNC to oppose AI implementation.

“After the initial speculation, boom-phase is over and the bubble bursts, and people realize that it’s really not good for most things, I think this whole moment is going to be a really bad look for a lot of people,” he said.

UNC’s new chief academic officer, though, thinks AI isn’t a fad. In a November Q&A with The DTH, incoming Provost Egerstedt said that as AI infiltrates education, he has seen people try to bury their heads in the sand and pretend it’s going away.

“That’s not happening,” he said.

X: @dailytarheel

Q&A

Incoming provost talks AI, engineering plans

Magnus Egerstedt explains his tenure, DEI ideologies

By Regan Butler
University Editor

University Editor Regan Butler sat down with incoming Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Magnus Egerstedt on Tuesday, Nov. 25, ahead of his start date in March. Following a year of impassioned debate at UNC surrounding artificial intelligence, tenure and DEI, Egerstedt discussed his vision for leading academics at the University.

This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

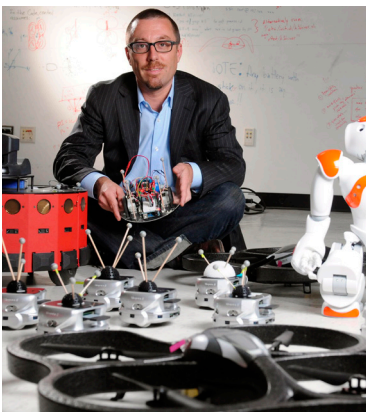


PHOTO COURTESY OF MAGNUS EGERSTEDT
Incoming Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Magnus Egerstedt poses for a portrait.

The Daily Tar Heel: The University has been making some pretty bold strokes in facilitating AI use in academia. For one, you’ll arrive on campus amid the AI-focused merger of the information science and data science schools. Considering your AI expertise and your hope to guide its integration here, how would you assess UNC’s approach thus far?

Magnus Egerstedt: I really, really like what Carolina is trying to do, which is to be on the front foot, really trying to embrace generative AI in virtually all facets of the enterprise. I think we’re doing our students a disservice if they graduate with a degree without being fluent generative AI operators.

And I don’t think of it as a merger. I think that’s the wrong word. I actually think it’s the creation of a new entity — really trying to imagine, what does this

look like when you have data, when you have information as being core to an academic discipline? I actually think that whatever this unit ends up being called, however it ends up being structured, it’s going to be a national model and I’m kind of excited about being part of the development of this.

DTH: Do you foresee a future at UNC where AI use is required, in some capacity, for some or all courses of study?

Egerstedt: Yes. I don’t think all, but certainly some — just like calculators are probably needed in some classes and laptops are needed in others. It’s a tool, and I think it’s a really important and useful tool, and we should embrace the tools that are out there.

DTH: You said you wanted to put engineering at the forefront when you arrive at UNC — how do you plan to do so?

Egerstedt: Engineering school or not, making sure that technology plays an important role in undergraduate education — I think makes sense.

I also think that one should really lean in hard on the things that UNC already does really well. So the health enterprise — biomedical engineering, pharmacology engineering. There is a very strong presence in data science. What I don’t think is productive is to go and pretend that you’re going to be a traditional, civil engineering-mechanical engineering program like other universities have.

DTH: Tenure’s merit has been a subject of debate at UNC following promotion holdups that occurred this past summer. Considering your higher education experience, what have you come to believe about tenure’s value? Do you think it should remain UNC?

Egerstedt: If we’re going to be the number one public university in the nation, we’ve got to be able to recruit the smartest, most passionate, most driven, most creative faculty out there. We’re going to compete with other universities. Other universities have tenure. We need tenure.

The other thing I want to say is, what makes public research universities such amazing engines of innovation is this idea of academic freedom — that you can

plant and let 1,000 flowers bloom. Some of these flowers are going to be great. Some won’t lead anywhere. But if people like me say we’re going to only pick these flowers, then all of a sudden you’re restricting this creative firework that is going on on a college campus. And tenure is also an important part of making sure that academic freedom is allowed to thrive.

DTH: During your time at UC Irvine, you were vocal about the value of diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education. Why did you choose to come to a university that has made significant DEI policy and program rollbacks?

Egerstedt: I believe strongly in the value of the public research university. I think it is a remarkable engine of social mobility. I think it’s a remarkable engine of innovation. I also think that because of that, we should hire the best faculty out there. And I also believe that we should make sure that all citizens of North Carolina can see themselves at [UNC].

I don’t believe, though, that we are served by quotas. I don’t believe that we are served when we make admissions or employment decisions that are based on inclusion or exclusion of a particular identity rather than merit. So I do value diversity a lot, but I do believe fundamentally that merit is the only way to go when it’s time for certain types of decisions.

X: @reganxbutler

BRIEF

University national rankings

#1

Best value public institution

#1

Public school for financial aid distribution

#2

Public school for students unqualified for financial aid

#16

Best value among all universities

City & State Editor reflects on 2025 coverage



DTH/CONNOR RUESCH

DTH City & State Editor Taylor Motley poses for a portrait at the DTH office on Franklin Street on Aug. 14.

By Taylor Motley
City & State Editor

Throughout 2025, Orange County and North Carolina navigated the first year of President Donald Trump’s second term, recovered from natural disasters and ushered in new leaders.

Looking at City & State news from the past year, nothing changed the community like Tropical Storm Chantal, later downgraded to a tropical depression, in July. Businesses suffered \$17 million in damages and more than 40 people were displaced. While some storefronts have reopened, Orange County is still reeling from the effects.

In his first year, Gov. Josh Stein has led North Carolina through a tumultuous time in the Republican-dominated legislature, vetoing several bills regarding topics such as compliance with ICE, concealed carry permits and federal private school tax credits.

The N.C. General Assembly is still yet to pass a budget, five months after it was initially due on July 1, leaving the state — and its residents — in limbo without needed funding to finance programs such as Medicaid and public safety initiatives.

Without a budget, the state has cut Medicaid reimbursement rates, leaving health care providers forced to potentially minimize services and lay off employees.

The year began by welcoming in new leadership on the state and federal level, and is ending with local elected officials being sworn into office.

Chapel Hill will swear in its newest town council members Wednesday. Two incumbents, Camille Berry and Paris Miller-Foushee, were elected alongside two challengers, Wes McMahon and Louie Rivers III.

It has been a hectic, eventful year in our great state. Get ready for a new year of local zoning laws, continued contention in the state legislature and the impactful 2026 midterms.

X: @dthcitystate

FLOODING

Residents still displaced months after storm

20 occupants of Camelot Village left in limbo with repairs

By Taylor Motley
City & State Editor

Five months ago, Annmarie Diede was living in her home at Camelot Village, where she had resided for 10 years. After Tropical Storm Chantal devastated the housing complex in July, Diede was forced to move to Florida, leaving behind her home, job and friends.

Diede is among the 20 residents who were displaced from Camelot Village after Tropical Storm Chantal, later downgraded to a depression, brought six to nine inches of rain to Chapel Hill in July.

Camelot Village, an apartment and condominium complex located along South Estes Drive, has historically been prone to flooding due to its close proximity to Bolin Creek.

As the storm flooded the parking lot and four feet of stormwater rushed into the first floor units, cars were wrecked, furniture was destroyed and entire units were made uninhabitable due to severe water damage.

In the months following the storm, residents have scarcely heard from the complex’s management team, Onyx Management & Consulting, about when their units will be repaired.

Onyx Management & Consulting did not respond to The Daily Tar Heel’s request for comment prior to publication.

Rolando Solis, who owns and rents out a unit at Camelot Village, said while he received a couple of emails from management shortly after the storm, there has been minimal communication since. Solis said there has not been specific communication about when the property will be repaired.

For residents, the continued lack of repairs means uprooting their lives and trying to find new homes while their units await repairs.

“It’s been expensive, because I have to pay expenses here and there. And I had to change my job, I had to change my relationships, my friends are there, my work was there,” Diede said. “It’s just been a total change.”

Many units at Camelot Village are individually owned and rented out. For owner-landlords at the property, the flooding has meant they are unable to rent out their property and receive rent payments from it.

“I feel like I don’t have nothing,” Solis said. “And all your investment or money cost, whatever you want to call it, is [in] limbo because you don’t know when it’s going to be fixed so you can use it, rent or sell it, whatever. You don’t know that, and there is no communication from anybody.”



DTH FILE/TAYLOR MOTLEY

Furniture sits outside of units at Camelot Village on July 12.



DTH FILE/MARINA MESSURA

A vehicle at Camelot Village is damaged from severe flooding brought on by Tropical Storm Chantal in July.

The Town of Chapel Hill received 72 permit applications for repairs at Camelot Village between Oct. 7 and Oct. 10, three months after the storm. The Town issued these permits to Production Construction, the contractor hired by the homeowners’ association, on Oct. 20.

Alex Carrasquillo, communications manager for the Town of Chapel Hill, said the Town has expedited the permit process for all properties damaged by Tropical Storm Chantal and waived permit fees to help people recover from the storm more quickly.

“What’s unique about this property and this work is that it was devastating for so many people who were impacted by it and there’s a lot of work that needs to happen at once,” Carrasquillo said.

Solis said that in his frequent visits back to Camelot Village, he has not seen construction or repair crews at the housing complex.



DTH FILE/TAYLOR MOTLEY

Annmarie Diede walks toward her condo at Camelot Village, which was flooded due to Tropical Storm Chantal, on July 12.

The weeks following the storm reignited previous efforts to unite the owners of Camelot Village units in hopes of receiving a buyout of the property that would lead to its demolition.

If all owners agreed to sell their units, the Town could receive a Federal Emergency Management Agency grant which would fund the buyout for the purpose of demolishing the complex and preventing future flood damage.

There have been several attempts over the past two decades to receive a buyout and have the complex demolished, but all have been unsuccessful either due to a lack of shared agreement among unit owners or FEMA denying the Town’s requested funding.

While some owners are remaining steadfast in their

attempts to achieve full agreement from all owners in favor of a buyout, Diede said at this point, many people are unlikely to support a buyout due to the lengthy process.

Once all owners agreed to the buyout, it could take two to three years for FEMA to allocate the funding.

Diede said she is worried that pursuing the buyout could lead to currently needed repairs never happening, leaving residents in limbo until the funds are received and the property is fully demolished.

Residents said they hope to see more communication from the property’s management about when repairs will be conducted and when they can return home.

“They’ve already taken everything they can from us,” Diede said.

X: @dthcitystate

BRIEF: Tropical Storm Chantal

As some businesses at Eastgate reopen, many remain closed

On the evening of Sunday, July 6, heavy rains brought by Tropical Storm Chantal, which was later downgraded to a tropical depression, brought severe flash flooding to Chapel Hill and surrounding areas.

One of the most severely affected areas was the Eastgate Crossing shopping center where the Town of Chapel Hill estimated that businesses incurred \$11 million in total damages from the storm. While many businesses have since reopened, many remain

temporarily closed, and a few even closed for good.

Eastgate, located between East Franklin Street and Fordham Boulevard, is home to dozens of businesses such as Trader Joe’s and Guglhupf Bakery & Restaurant. It sits on top of Booker Creek, making it prone to flood damage.

Olmaz Jewelers, a retail jewelry store at Eastgate Crossing, experienced between \$250,000 and \$350,000 in loss of inventory

and showcases, as well as additional costs for store remodeling.

The Loop, a franchise pizza restaurant in the shopping center, was completely devastated. Restaurant owner Scott Novak said the store would need to be completely gutted and rebuilt — a process he said would take months and cost the restaurant hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Right after the storm, every Eastgate storefront was closed. Now nearly five months later, many have reopened — including Trader

Joe’s, Great Outdoors Provision Company, Olmaz Jewelers, Chipotle, Chopt Creative Salad Co., Shake Shack and Guglhupf. And one brand new store, J. Crew Factory, opened in November.

The Loop, Kipos Greek Taverna, Aldi, Bruegger’s Bagels and many others remain temporarily closed. Rise Chicken & Biscuits, Talbots and Starbucks closed permanently after the flooding.

— Alli Pardue, Editor-in-Chief

LOCAL ELECTION RESULTS



Jess Anderson elected Chapel Hill mayor

PHOTO COURTESY OF JESS ANDERSON



Barbara Foushee elected Carrboro mayor

PHOTO COURTESY OF BARBARA FOUSHEE



Camille Berry elected to Chapel Hill Town Council

PHOTO COURTESY OF CAMILLE BERRY



Paris Miller-Foushee elected to Chapel Hill Town Council

PHOTO COURTESY OF PARIS MILLER-FOUSHEE



Louie Rivers III elected to Chapel Hill Town Council

PHOTO COURTESY OF LOUIE RIVERS III



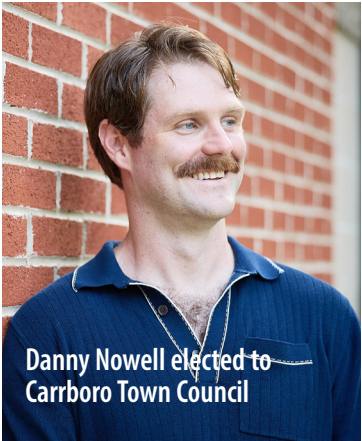
Wes McMahon elected to Chapel Hill Town Council

PHOTO COURTESY OF WES MCMAHON



Fred Joiner elected to Carrboro Town Council

DTH FILE/ANGELINA KATSANIS



Danny Nowell elected to Carrboro Town Council

PHOTO COURTESY OF DANNY NOWELL



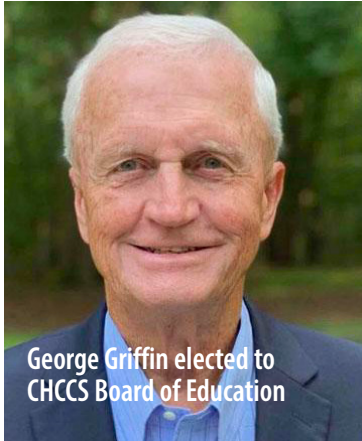
Cristóbal Palmer elected to Carrboro Town Council

PHOTO COURTESY OF CRISTÓBAL PALMER



Melinda Manning elected to CHCCS Board of Education

PHOTO COURTESY OF MELINDA MANNING



George Griffin elected to CHCCS Board of Education

PHOTO COURTESY OF GEORGE GRIFFIN



Riza Jenkins elected to CHCCS Board of Education

PHOTO COURTESY OF RIZA JENKINS

MEDICAL

North Carolina residents face 2026 health insurance increases

Affordable Care Act enrollees will likely see their costs double

By Taylor Motley
City & State Editor

When Virginia Gilbert opened a letter informing her that her health insurance cost would more than double for 2026, she laughed — it was absurd to her. That laughter quickly turned into stress.

Gilbert, who enrolls in Affordable Care Act health insurance, is one of many North Carolinians who will see their health insurance policy rates increase for 2026 as ACA policy rates increase and federal premium tax credits expire.

In late October, three days before open enrollment began, the North Carolina Department of Insurance announced that individual ACA policy rates in the state for 2026 will increase by an average of nearly 28.6 percent, slightly above the national average of a 26 percent increase.

Across the country, insurance premiums are rising due to increased health care costs related to medical services and medications, Barry Smith, the deputy director of communications at the North Carolina Department of Insurance, said.

“We have a lot of really wonderful medicines and they may prevent a lot of really serious problems down the road, but they’re also expensive,” Smith said.

The increases in ACA policy rates coincide with the upcoming expiration of premium tax credits at the end of 2025. Premium tax credits, initially created by the ACA and since extended through federal bills, provide either an advance payment or refundable credit to support the purchase of ACA health care plans.

More than 888,000 people in North Carolina receive premium tax credits — 96 percent of the about 924,000 North Carolina residents that enroll in ACA insurance. On average, residents receive \$574 per month through premium tax credits.



DTH DESIGN/AUBREY WORD

Rep. Deborah Ross (D-N.C. District 2) said she and other Democrats in Congress have been working to enact legislation to extend the premium tax credits for months, but face pushback from Republican legislators.

“If we don’t get the job done, we know who’s to blame. It’s clearly the Republicans who are to blame,” Ross said. “They have not come up with any way of helping the American people.”

The combination of increased ACA policy rates and the likely expiration of premium tax credits for 2026 means that many North Carolina residents enrolling in ACA insurance will see their health insurance costs double.

North Carolina residents now have to navigate finding a way to afford the increased health insurance costs, choose a lower-category plan or opt out of health insurance altogether.

“My biggest fear is that people are going to see those prices and they’re not going to get any insurance, because they’re going to think, ‘I can’t afford this,’ and they’re going to take a chance and go uninsured, especially if they’re healthy,” Rebecca Cereze, a senior policy advocate with the Health Advocacy Project at the North Carolina Justice Center, said.

ACA health insurance plans have four categories ranging from

bronze to platinum. Bronze and silver plans have lower premiums but higher deductibles and copays, whereas gold and platinum plans have higher premiums but lower deductibles and copays.

Gilbert said she plans to enroll in a bronze plan next year rather than continue her current gold plan. At 63 years old, Gilbert said while the bronze plan is still expensive, she is worried about what could happen if she does not enroll in health insurance.

“I just can’t afford to not have insurance and then, God forbid something happens,” Gilbert said.

If more people — especially healthy people — choose to opt out of health insurance, insurance companies will likely continue to raise premiums in the future to account for loss revenue from those not enrolling and increased costs of covering sick people, Smith said.

“It really becomes a systemic issue, and it’s already so expensive to live in the country and pay your taxes and buy groceries and everything,” Gilbert said. “I just think the government, the current administration, has wreaked havoc on people.”

X: @dthcitystate

POLITICS

Josh Stein navigates leading the state alongside Republican officials

North Carolina governor pushes for bipartisan efforts

By Jessica Hudnut
Assistant City & State Editor

Since being sworn in on Jan. 1, North Carolina Gov. Josh Stein has been navigating a changing role as the Democratic governor of a state with a predominantly Republican legislature.

The North Carolina governor position has been stripped of key powers in recent years by the North Carolina General Assembly. In December 2024, shortly before Stein took office, a bill that removed the governor’s ability to make appointments to the State Board of Elections passed over then-Gov. Roy Cooper’s veto.

“The North Carolina governor, by the constitution, is one of the weakest governors in the country,” Meredith College professor of political science David McLennan said.

The governor also has no role in redistricting and is unable to veto maps approved by the legislature, as was realized in October when a new congressional district map was passed by the legislature along party lines.

Sen. Graig Meyer (D-Orange, Caswell, Person) said the legislature

had also taken away powers from the governor role during Cooper’s terms, and previously during those of former Gov. Pat McCrory.

However, McLennan said that Stein remains a crucial figure in North Carolina politics. He retains the power to veto bills, vetoing 15 bills so far during his first term. Of these, eight have ultimately become law after successful overrides by the legislature.

North Carolina Rep. Renée Price (D-Caswell, Orange) said she supported Stein’s veto of Senate Bill 50, also known as Freedom to Carry NC, which would have lowered the age requirement for concealed carry of firearms to 18 years old.

Both Meyer and Price said they were disappointed to see Stein sign House Bill 307, also known as Iryna’s Law, which opened the door for the reintroduction of capital punishment in North Carolina. The state has not carried out an execution since 2006.

Senate President Pro Tempore Phil Berger (R-Guilford, Rockingham), on the other hand, criticized Stein for his delay in signing H.B. 307, accusing him of prioritizing donors over the people of North Carolina. Stein signed Iryna’s Law on Oct. 3, 10 days after it was presented to him.

“He should have signed it as soon as it hit his desk,” Berger wrote in a post on X.

Stein once again faced scrutiny from both sides of the aisle when U.S. Customs and Border Patrol arrived in North Carolina in November. Meyer said Stein tried and failed to take a centrist position on the issue, ultimately shifting his rhetoric throughout the week.

Stein also contends with a Republican administration federally. In spite of their political differences, he collaborated with Republicans in the state and federal governments to secure funding for Hurricane Helene recovery efforts in western North Carolina.

Price said she appreciates Stein’s efforts to work across the aisle.

“Somehow, along the way, we’ve got to be able to come to terms with one another and do what’s right for the people of North Carolina,” Price said.

Meyer said that this legislative session has seen North Carolina Democrats struggling to make meaningful progress without any clear goal to work toward.

“If you’re only playing defense, you’re inevitably gonna lose,” Meyer said. “You have to play some offense, and I really would like to see Governor Stein provide more leadership on giving us a clear vision of what we should all be working toward.”

X: @jessicahudnut

NORTH CAROLINA | BUDGET

Facing funding cuts, N.C. lowers Medicaid reimbursement rates



DTH DESIGN/ANNABELLE HENDERSON

Program needs \$319 million more to fully support services

By Taylor Motley
City & State Editor

As North Carolina continues to operate without a budget, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services cut Medicaid reimbursement rates due to the budget deficit, leaving health care providers tasked with covering more of the costs of Medicaid services.

Since Oct. 1, health care providers in North Carolina have experienced reduced rates of reimbursement for services to Medicaid patients ranging from three percent to 10 percent depending on the specific type of provider. Pharmacies and physician administered drug programs are not facing cuts.

The department still needs \$319 million in recurring funds for the biennium budget to fully fund the Medicaid rebase — which provides funds for the program to account for changes in program enrollment and health care costs each year.

In North Carolina, 25 percent of the population receives health coverage through Medicaid. In rural counties, that percent rises to more than half of rural counties' populations being covered through Medicaid.

While each chamber of the N.C. General Assembly passed its own proposed budget, including funding for the Medicaid rebase, the House of Representatives and the Senate have been in a months-long stalemate over tax cuts and initiative funding clauses in each chamber's proposed budget,

preventing a full budget from being passed.

The General Assembly passed a mini budget in July that allocated \$500 million to the Medicaid rebase, leaving a \$319 million deficit from the requested \$819 million needed to fund the rebase.

N.C. Rep. Allen Buansi (D-Orange) said that the General Assembly's inability to pass a budget, and the subsequent effects, is a failure of the General Assembly's duty to North Carolina residents.

"One thing I know for sure is that if the North Carolina General Assembly had done its job and passed a budget earlier this year, our most vulnerable wouldn't find themselves in this situation," Buansi said.

When the NCDHHS knew that they would have to make up for the \$319 million deficit, they had to choose between reducing reimbursement rates, cutting optional benefits or encouraging a change in eligibility by the General Assembly, Jay Ludlam, the deputy secretary for NC Medicaid, said.

The NCDHHS specifically chose to cut reimbursement rates with the hopes that once a budget is passed, it will be easier to reinstate reimbursement rates than it would be to reintroduce benefits or update eligibility, Ludlam said.

Hospitals, hospice centers, nursing facilities, freestanding birth centers, anesthesiology, ambulatory surgical centers, dental ambulatory services, hospital outpatient laboratories, Research-Based Intensive Behavioral Health Treatment, emergency rooms and ventilator facilities faced the highest rate of cuts at 10 percent.

In the process of deciding what rate of cuts different services

would receive, NCDHHS focused on minimizing rate reductions for services that had not received rate increases from the General Assembly in a long time, Ludlam said.

The department gave facilities such as hospitals and nursing facilities, where the state spends most of its Medicaid money on, higher cuts to make up for most of the deficit, he said.

While most health care providers are yet to see significant impacts from the Medicaid cuts, they are preparing for the worst — employees being laid off, services being cut and investments being put on hold.

Bonnie Meadows, the president of the North Carolina Nurses Association, said while she is hopeful that a budget will pass and the full reimbursement rates will be reinstated, she is worried that if the cuts continue, it could impact patients.

"There's always a fear that this could go longer than we want it to and there could be a loss of positions in some very key areas," Meadows said. "And to have to recoup that, that just creates a gap in care for patients, where there really shouldn't be one. They shouldn't have to worry about this."

If the state continues without a budget and the Medicaid cuts persist, Ludlam said he expects health care providers will stop participating in Medicaid.

"This problem will simply get worse," Ludlam said. "But we do have an opportunity to reverse those cuts and get back to the business of just providing access to care for people."

X: @dthcitystate

General Assembly remains divided, five months later

Senate and House are debating proposed tax cuts

By Ha Lien Gaskin
Staff Writer

North Carolina is the only state in the country expected to enter the new year without a state budget.

Instead of passing a full state budget, which was due to be agreed upon and passed by July 1, the N.C. General Assembly has passed two mini-budgets. The state is otherwise continuing to operate on the legislation from the previous biennium, called a continuation budget.

North Carolina operates on a biennial budget, meaning that the state budget covers two fiscal years. The majority-Republican N.C. House of Representatives and Senate have been unable to reach a compromise and pass the state budget for 2025-27.

The main disagreement between the two chambers lies in the individual and corporate tax rate cuts that the Senate has proposed.

"The Senate did not concur with the House's version of the budget, which means it then got sent into conference," Christine Wunsche, director of the Legislative Reporting Service at the UNC School of Government, said. "That's not unusual. That's basically what we expect to see with the budget."

North Carolina has gone as long as two years without a budget before. From 2019 to 2021, former N.C. Gov. Roy Cooper and the Republican-led General Assembly were unable to compromise on a budget.

House leaders believe that these tax cuts proposed by the Senate are too steep to be sustainable and want to maintain rates in order to raise state employee salaries and other expenses, N.C. Sen. Graig Meyer (D-Caswell, Orange, Person) said.

Meyer said he thinks that Senate Republicans are intentionally not negotiating the state budget with

the House because, as long as the budget is stalled, another stage of tax cuts will go into effect on Jan. 1 anyways, without the House being able to argue against them.

"I think it is incredibly disappointing, because I think that we have a responsibility to make sure that we are doing what the state needs, and I think that they have completely failed to do that," Meyer said. "And I think that the tax cut issue is a really critical issue, and I am really glad that the House has stood firm on wanting to postpone the tax cuts and to have a more sensible tax approach."

As late state budget agreements become more common, Sally Hodges-Copple, a public policy analyst at the NC Budget and Tax Center, said that it is important that lawmakers remain committed to honoring the state budget deadlines. She said federal actions are already projected to shift costs to state governments, citing cuts to Medicaid and food assistance.

"So at the same time that North Carolina is going to need more state resources to meet that to compensate for federal cuts, lawmakers are remaining committed to these tax cuts for corporations and that largely benefit the wealthy few, instead of pausing those cuts and passing a state budget that can stabilize our communities in a really difficult time," Hodges-Copple said.

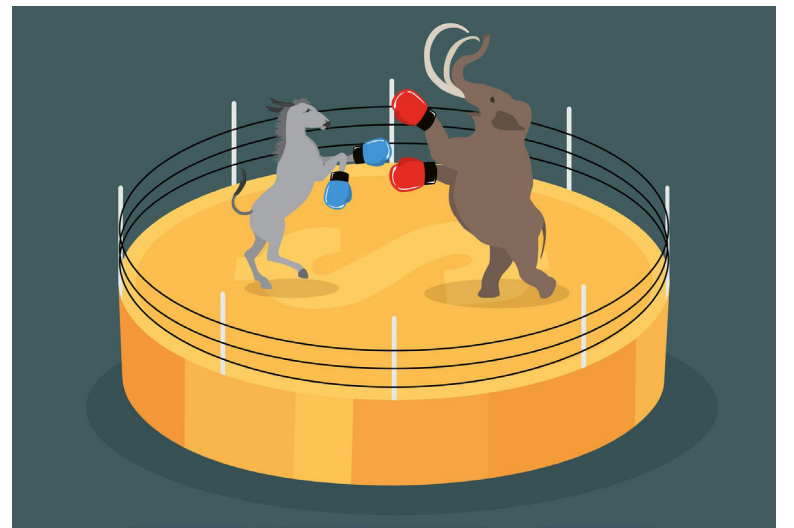
As the stalemate drags on, everyone from teachers to farmers has felt the impact. On Nov. 19, Senate Democrats held a public hearing where North Carolinians talked about how they have been affected by the budget delays.

Until a budget bill has been passed by both chambers of the General Assembly, no changes can be made.

"If they don't agree on anything, then there is no next step," Meyer said. "And so we're just in an indefinite holding pattern, and I don't think that we will have a budget."

The General Assembly is not set to reconsider the budget until April 2026.

X: @halienwg



DTH DESIGN/AUBREY WORD

BRIEF: Gerrymandering

Federal judges uphold the state's new congressional map

A panel of federal judges denied requests to block the General Assembly from using its recently redrawn congressional map Wednesday, allowing the map to remain in place for the upcoming 2026 midterm elections.

The North Carolina NAACP and individual voters argued in a pair of lawsuits that the new map violated the 14th amendment by aiming to dilute the collective power of Black voters.

The new map alters the borders of Congressional District 1 and

District 3 in Eastern North Carolina, shifting four counties out of District 1 and into District 3 while also moving six counties previously in District 3 into District 1 in order to make District 1 more friendly to Republicans.

Judges Allison Rushing, Richard Myers II and Thomas Schroeder — all Republican appointees — wrote in the ruling that while plaintiffs proved candidates preferred by Black voters were less likely to be successful in District 1 under the new map than its previous

iteration, the evidence did not show the legislature acted with discriminatory intent. Instead, they found that the General Assembly redrew the map based on partisanship, which is generally permissible after the North Carolina Supreme Court's 2023 ruling that state courts can not block partisan gerrymanders.

"None of the counties moved between CD 1 and 3 are majority black, and none belong to what Plaintiffs characterize as the Black Belt," they wrote in the ruling.

The map is a part of a broader national push from both parties to redraw state congressional districts ahead of the 2026 midterm elections. N.C. Sen. Ralph Hise (R-Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Caldwell, Haywood, Madison, Mitchell, Watauga, Yancey), who disclosed himself as the sole author of the map, said multiple times he did not use any racial data while drawing it. During the case's preliminary injunction hearing, Hise said the sole motivation behind the map was to give his party a partisan advantage.

"As Democrat-run states like California do everything in their power to undermine President Trump's administration and agenda, North Carolina Republicans went to work to protect the America First Agenda," N.C. Senate President Pro Tempore Phil Berger (R-Guilford, Rockingham) wrote in a statement following the decision.

— Sarah Clements,
Assistant City & State Editor

Lifestyle Editor reflects on 2025 coverage



DTH/CONNOR RUESCH
DTH Lifestyle Editor Lola Oliverio poses for a portrait at the DTH office on Franklin Street on Aug. 14.

By Lola Oliverio
Lifestyle Editor

The Lifestyle Desk aims to provide coverage of interesting and important arts and culture stories both on campus and around the world. Whether it's widespread pop culture phenomena, media reviews, on-campus event coverage or local artist spotlights, the Lifestyle Desk works hard to showcase fascinating and unique arts-related happenings.

In terms of accomplishments within our desk, this fall, we revived The Daily Tar Heel's series Editor's Notes, which functions similarly to NPR's "Tiny Desk." We had two performances from lovely local bands Davie Circle and redkanoo, marking the first time two episodes of Editor's Notes have ever come to fruition within one semester. We already have bands lined up for the spring, so make sure to stay tuned.

Additionally, we created a new series, Tasting The Town, in which editors venture around the Chapel Hill-Carrboro area, tasting — and rating — various foods. So far, we've had three installments — pizza, beer and mozzarella sticks — all with an audio-visual component, and plan to establish a consistent Tasting The Town upload schedule in the spring.

This year has been full of developments within the arts world, both locally — like Tropical Storm Chantal's effect on the Eno Arts Mill, the revival of literary magazine Carolina Quarterly and a 10 a.m. Ludacris concert on the Quad — and worldwide, like the release of "Wicked: For Good," the performative male contest or the whirlwind that was "The Summer I Turned Pretty."

Us lifestyle editors would like to continue bringing our readership a curated mix of event coverage, features, reviews, pop culture analyses and stories focused on the arts. As this year comes to a close, our writers are taking a look at the most popular arts, culture and daily life moments at UNC and across the world.

X: @dthlifestyle

ODDITIES

The strangest happenings at UNC this year

MrBeast, Ludacris and other fascinating figures graced campus

By Cooper Hall
Senior Writer

From Bill Belichick and Jordon Hudson in Kenan Stadium to Tinder pop-ups and Lee Roberts handing out coffee in the Pit during finals last semester, UNC was full of peculiar moments this year. These quirks define the strange, eccentric, arbitrary part of our campus culture. In case you missed any or just want to be reminded of the weirdness at UNC, let this be your roundup of campus oddities from 2025.

Tyler Hansbrough, a star UNC basketball player from 2005 to 2009, made a surprising resurgence in UNC culture this year. Hansbrough co-taught a sports communication course in the Hussman School of Journalism and Media. If becoming a visiting professor wasn't surprising enough, the former Tar Heel competed in "The Dancing Tar Heels," a ballroom competition modeled after Dancing with the Stars run by the UNC Ballroom Dance Team. Hansbrough, standing at six-foot-nine, dancing the jive and sashaying across the stage in the Great Hall was a true campus anomaly.

The cloth-spinning guy on the Quad was a lesser-known but equally fascinating character on campus this year. Ben Tonnesen, a senior majoring in physics, stood on the grassy area across from Gardner Hall for two hours every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, tossing a cloth star while listening to EDM music as a form of meditation. During class change, many students watched his demonstration in awe and likely confusion, musing over what was happening and why. The cohesive interest and bewilderment are exactly what made Tonnesen and his cloth-throwing art a prominent campus wonder.

In another surprise classroom appearance, North Carolinian YouTuber MrBeast visited Business 410: Business Analytics in early October. During the class, Vinit Satasia, a business administration major, won \$30,000 for flipping a coin. The class disruption, celebrity appearance and hefty cash prize created significant buzz across campus on apps like Yik Yak and Instagram.

Additionally, in both January and February, Chapel Hill saw snow multiple times. In central North Carolina, that in and of itself is an oddity. The first snowfall in January broke the Triangle's second-longest stretch of no measurable snow, ending the streak at 1,076 days. More than just the abnormal weather, however, the snow-covered ground brought out the weird side of students. Some of the highlights from these snow days were snowball fights on the field in Kenan Stadium, sledding down the hill that leads to the Dean E. Smith Center in a shopping cart or on dorm mattresses and the infamous nude snow sculpture in the Quad.

Following in the footsteps of other cities and college campuses, the performative male contest as well as the performative masculine lesbian contest both established themselves as campus peculiarities at UNC. The events drew large crowds to the Pit and featured high amounts of dedicated, enthusiastic performers.



Performative male contestants pose for a photo on Sept. 5.



Ludacris performs on Polk Place during the Chapel Thrill Concert Series on Oct. 4.



DTH FILE/PEARCE BARNES
UNC students enjoy a rare snow day in Chapel Hill on Feb. 2.



DTH FILE/MORGAN WORSLEY
UNC senior Ben Tonnesen does some spinning tricks with a Flow Star at Polk Place on Oct. 22.

The arrival of Belichick also introduced the Chapel Thrill Concert Series, which led to all kinds of bizarre happenings. Chase Rice, Fitz and the Tantrums and, of course, Ludacris gracing a temporary stage in front of Wilson Library was certainly not on anyone's 2025 bingo card. The early morning start time for Ludacris' show really cemented the concert series's status as a notable weird event on campus. Multiple times throughout his 10 a.m. set, the singer remarked that it was the earliest show he had ever played.

Last, but certainly not least, the ever-steady Whistler continued to mosey his way through campus day after day this year. His operatic vocals and smooth whistle could be heard from almost any corner of main campus, single-handedly creating the eerie and unique soundtrack of UNC students' walks.

One final oddity that cannot be easily summed up and still remains a mystery: the "UNC pisser," an elusive TikTok user who posted videos relieving themselves around campus.

Here is to a truly odd 2025. May 2026 be even odder.

X: @dthlifestyle

2025: A YEAR IN REVIEW

January



On Jan. 20, Donald Trump began his non-consecutive second term as president of the United States.

ROBERTO SCHMIDT/GETTY IMAGES

February



On Feb. 14, Adolfo Alvarez was elected as UNC's 2025-26 student body president — the first Latino student to ever hold the office.

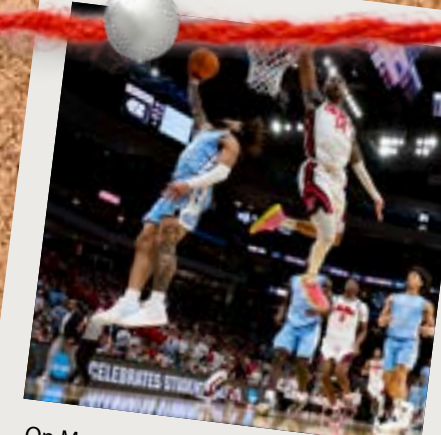
DTH FILE/ABBEY MCKEE



On Feb. 19, students trekked through the snow to watch UNC men's basketball ace N.C. State in the Dean E. Smith Center. For just the third time in UNC basketball history, general admission was offered to anyone who could "safely walk to the game."

DTH FILE/DYLAN THIESSEN

March



On March 21, graduate guard RJ Davis played his final game with the Tar Heels. UNC lost to Ole Miss, 64-71, in the NCAA tournament first round.

DTH FILE/HEATHER DIEHL

April



In April, the federal government terminated visas of six international students. Later in the month, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio reversed course and restored all six of them.

ALEX BRANDON/GETTY IMAGES/TNS

May



On April 3, UNC announced that Chris Clemens would step down as provost at the end of the school year. Clemens remains a physics and astronomy professor at the University.

DTH FILE/CONNOR RUESCH



On May 25, the UNC women's lacrosse team won its fourth national championship, defeating Northwestern 12-8.

DTH FILE/SOPHIA GRAY

June



In June, the House v. NCAA ruling changed the landscape of college athletics, allowing universities to pay student athletes directly.

DTH FILE/AVA SHARON



On June 14, around 5 million Americans marched in protest against the Trump administration across all 50 states — including here in the Triangle.

DTH FILE/MASON MILLER

July



On July 6, Tropical Storm Chantal brought historic flooding in Chapel Hill and the surrounding areas. The storm resulted in one death, nine injuries, dozens displaced from their homes and dozens of businesses devastated.

DTH FILE/OLIVIA PAUL

August



In August, the UNC Chancellor's Office ordered the removal of a student-created pro-Palestinian mural on campus without warning or consulting the art department.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MEG MACKENZIE

September



In September, UNC placed professor Dwayne Dixon on leave for four days amid controversy surrounding his alleged advocacy of political violence.

DTH FILE/ABBEY MCKEE



On Labor Day, eight-time Super Bowl champion Bill Belichick lost his debut game as head coach of UNC football against TCU.

DTH FILE/PEARCE BARNES



In September, former Provost Chris Clemens sued UNC and every member of the Board of Trustees, alleging violations of N.C. public records and open meetings laws.

DTH FILE/VIVADA SOUTHAVONE



On Oct. 9, the University announced that two schools — the School of Information and Library Science and the School of Data Science and Society — would merge to form one school focused on artificial intelligence.

DTH FILE/HAYDON BODE

October



In October, the UNC Black Student Movement announced that UNC had dissolved their 52-year "co-ownership" of the Upendo Lounge.

DTH FILE/MORGAN WORSLEY

November



In November, Orange County allocated \$54,000 to community organizations for food distribution services amid cuts and delays to SNAP benefits. The delays were due to Congress' 43-day government shutdown — the longest in U.S. history.

DTH FILE/HAYDON BODE



On Nov. 18, U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents arrived in the Triangle and detained multiple people after arresting hundreds in Charlotte.

KHADEJEH NIKOUYEH/THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

REVIEW

Human nature shines through musical releases

Past year highlights raw emotion in a stark rebellion against AI

By Sophia Firdausi
Staff Writer

With new technology at our fingertips, artists both new and old have begun to incorporate the digital age into their sounds. However, the music of this year isn't synthetic or robotic sounding — if anything, the sounds of 2025 display our social reaction to things like AI over-saturation and, thus, our need to return to human intimacy.

Across genres, 2025 proved that music's future doesn't lie in perfect replication or algorithmic ease. Instead, the artists who shaped the year used technology in service of something profoundly analog: texture, memory and emotional truth.

SZA — “SOS Deluxe: Lana”

This tension between digital possibility and emotional grounding defined nearly every major release of the year. Take SZA, for instance. Early in the year, she re-issued her 2022 breakthrough album “SOS” as “SOS Deluxe: Lana,” adding 15 new tracks.

The 2025 edition was not simply an add-on — it played like a recalibration. Rather than stretch her sound toward maximalism or polished futuristic pop, SZA leaned deeper into rough-edged humanity. Her vocals crack, drift and breathe, and the production feels intimate and grainy, almost like it's bending under emotional weight. In a cultural moment where AI can replicate a perfect vocal take, SZA instead foregrounded imperfection.

Geese — “Getting Killed”

The post-punk revival surged back into mainstream consciousness through Geese, whose 2025 output “Getting Killed” injected New York's rock scene with theatrical volatility. Their work swings between mania and euphoria, embodying this generation's hyper-aware instability. It wasn't rebellion for

rebellion's sake, however; it was self-expression forged from chaos, a kind of communal catharsis for listeners who recognized their own fractured humor and restless reflected energy in the band's sound.

FKA Twigs — “Eusexua”

On the opposite end of the emotional spectrum, FKA Twigs re-entered the cultural moment with “Eusexua,” a project that refused digital excess in favor of softness. While she has always taken on a futuristic sound, her 2025 work reimagined futurism through intimacy: breathy vocals, choral layering, plucked strings and subtle electronic scaffolding. Twigs showcased slowness and delicacy — qualities increasingly rare in a world of accelerating noise.

De La Soul — “Cabin in the Sky”

2025 was also a year of remembrance and musical reclamation. De La Soul's announcement of “Cabin in the Sky” marked a historic moment after their long fight to regain their masters. The project, arriving nearly a decade after their last full-length album, felt both elegiac and triumphant, strengthening the lineage between hip-hop's past and its digital-age future.

Mac Miller — “Balloonerism”

The year's deepest emotional rupture came from Mac Miller's long-awaited posthumous album, “Balloonerism.” Recorded a decade earlier, its raw demos, hushed production and existential themes reminded listeners of the fragility at the core of Miller's artistry. The album was a time capsule — an unpolished yet devastating window into a mind wrestling with pain, humor and hope.

In 2025, a year marked by a race toward artificial intelligence, we were reminded why we still need human noise — it is messy, vulnerable and fiercely alive.

X: @dthlifestyle

RECAP

Looking back on this year's top pop culture phenomena

From the Coldplay affair to Sydney Sweeney's jeans

By Emma Arthur
Senior Writer

This year was packed with several unforgettable moments in pop culture, from transformative events like the TikTok ban, to singular incidents like the Coldplay concert affair. Here is a recap of some the biggest moments of the year.

“The Summer I Turned Pretty” season three

The final season of the Amazon Prime original series, “The Summer I Turned Pretty,” aired from July to September. The show, which is set in New England, used UNC's campus as a filming location last summer, as the show's creator Jenny Han completed her undergraduate degree here. Every Wednesday, audiences sat down to watch Isabel “Belly” Conklin (Lola Tung) choose between brothers Conrad (Christopher Briney) and Jeremiah Fisher (Gavin Casalegno). For a brief period, it felt like online spaces were dominated by one question: Are you team Conrad or team Jeremiah?

Kendrick Lamar Super Bowl halftime show

The Super Bowl LIX halftime show featured Kendrick Lamar as the first ever solo rapper to headline the performance.

One of the more notable moments of this concert was when Lamar performed “Not Like Us,” a diss track against Canadian rapper Drake. There was speculation about whether Lamar would perform it given the controversy around the song, but he did anyway, shocking the masses. Lamar also made political statements with characters and symbols, creating the most viewed halftime show in history.



DTH DESIGN/STEPHANIE HUGHES

TikTok ban in the United States

In January, the U.S. Supreme Court banned the social media app TikTok for about 12 hours due to national security concerns. During that period, users and creators all over the country mourned what many consider the most influential app of our generation.

Sydney Sweeney controversy

2025 was undoubtedly the year of actress Sydney Sweeney's downfall. In May, Sweeney announced a collaboration with soap brand Dr. Squatch. The soap, called “Sydney's Bathwater Bliss,” was made with her real bathwater. The public expressed distaste for Sweeney after this incident, arguing that she was leaning into misogyny and playing into the male gaze.

Sweeney was then part of an American Eagle campaign in which Sweeney stared into the camera, saying, “Genes are passed down from parents to offspring, often determining traits like hair color, personality and even eye color. My jeans are blue.”

Some members of the public argued it was promoting eugenics, a white supremacist theory, with its cryptic wording about genes.

Others felt that Sweeney further objectified herself due to the sexual undertones of the campaign. Despite American Eagle's stock spiking, the conversation surrounding the

advertisement resulted in the ad being pulled from American Eagle's website, and the clothing brand issued an apology days after the ad first aired.

Coldplay concert affair

On July 15, Gillette Stadium's kiss cam landed on Astronomer ex-CEO Andy Byron and the company's former Chief People Officer Kristin Cabot, who were caught hugging then quickly ducking out of view.

It quickly came out that, though Cabot and her husband were separated, Byron was married. This fueled widespread speculation and, later, public condemnation.

The event instantly blew up on social media, leading to the resignations of both Byron and Cabot from their roles at the company.

While these are some of the most notable pop culture moments this year, there were many others, from the Labubu keychain craze to the rise of Dubai chocolate.

Some pop culture phenomena even made their way into our campus, like the performative male contest and the newest season of Dancing with the Stars. At the end of the day, one thing that will always bring people together is pop culture, whether it's something innocuous — like a new TV series or movie — or the newest celebrity scandal.

X: @dthlifestyle

REVIEW

From ‘Superman’ to ‘Bugonia’: The best movies of 2025

An AMC Stubs A-List membership and 25 cinema trips later

By Sean Doyle
Staff Writer

There has been a lot to be excited about in the movie industry lately. This year brought the return of some of cinema's best auteurs, saw newer directors legitimize themselves and it had “A Minecraft Movie,” which became a meme in and of itself.

I went to the theater over 25 times this year and have plenty of movies to, and not to, recommend.

10. “Black Bag”

This sleek spy-thriller flew under the radar in early 2025. It pulled me in with its story and smooth direction by Steven Soderbergh. It features a badass British spy couple unraveling a conspiracy. Coming in at only 93 minutes, this film surprised me with how much intrigue it packed into such a short runtime.

9. “Eddington”

Remember that super fun year 2020? Yeah, me neither. Thankfully, director Ari Aster recreated that



DTH DESIGN/AMANDA HESS

feeling of dread and confusion from the pandemic era with “Eddington.” The film stars Joaquin Phoenix and Pedro Pascal as a feuding sheriff and mayor. The chaos that ensues is hilarious, tragic and representative of our current cultural and political climate.

8. “Rental Family”

This Japanese-American production stars Brendan Fraser as an American actor struggling to find work and human connection in Japan. He finds a job where he is hired to “act”

as a father, husband or friend for people who need help in their life. It's a heart-warming story about honesty, happiness and living life to the fullest.

7. “Bugonia”

I wrote a full review for “Bugonia” earlier this year, and despite how uncomfortable it made me feel, that feeling has stuck with me. Only special movies are able to leave this type of impact on the viewer, and this is why it deserves a spot on my list.

6. “Superman”

James Gunn's first entry into the DC Universe was a colorful, fun and hopeful one. David Corenswet and Rachel Brosnahan shine as Superman and Lois Lane, but the most memorable part of the movie was Nicholas Hoult's portrayal of Lex Luthor. I left excited for what is to come next from DC.

5. “28 Years Later”

The third entry in the “28 Days Later” franchise is a return to form. Danny Boyle employs his hectic zooms and cuts to create unforgettable sequences. Be warned, however, that this is the first of a new trilogy, so it ends on a cliffhanger that you will either love or hate.

4. “Weapons”

“Weapons” delivered everything I could want from a horror movie. It had interesting, complex characters, an intriguing core mystery, scenes that were scary without relying on jump scares and an outstanding ending. I loved the decision to follow the different characters' points-of-view, as it made uncovering the mystery that much more fun.

3. “Sinners”

Ryan Coogler's newest film was a box-office sensation, and the scene where Sammie (Miles Caton) sings at the juke joint is absolutely transcendent, one of the best of the year, for sure. The blend of horror, music and action within a period piece makes “Sinners” one of the most original blockbusters in recent memory.

2. “Sorry, Baby”

Eva Victor writes, directs and stars in this gem of a debut. The film follows Victor's character as they learn how to live as a survivor of sexual assault. The difficult subject matter is presented in an honest, thoughtful way. It switches tone effortlessly without losing its sincerity, making it my favorite indie release this year.

1. “One Battle After Another”

If there is one movie on the list you need to see, it is this one. Comedy, action, thriller, political conspiracy and family drama are just a few words that describe Paul Thomas Anderson's newest film. However, I'll just use one: amazing.

X: @dthlifestyle

CHIC

A look back at 2025’s biggest fashion trends

From athlesisure to business casual, UNC students showed out

By Tiffany Plusnick
Staff Writer

The sidewalks of UNC Chapel Hill’s campus had new 2025 styles on full display. Between heading to an 8 a.m. class or going out on Franklin Street at night, fashion made a statement: denim got looser, trends from the past returned, boots grew chunkier and headphones became a key part of almost every outfit.

This year, instead of rolling out of bed in sleepwear or whatever they could throw on, many students showed up to class head-to-toe in fully styled looks, with long jorts and barrel jeans emerging as standout staples.

Long denim jorts emerged from skate and street culture in the late ‘80s and ‘90s. The revival is somewhat reminiscent of elementary school, making sure your shorts passed the dress code, but in a stylish way.

Barrel jeans — a petite girl’s worst nightmare — also made an appearance. While sizing up for baggier jeans is a popular choice, this style of denim is controversial among many people due to its billowing legs and tapered hems. Some argue that barrel jeans only flatter those 5’7 and taller, while others say they are a no-go if you have a short torso.

Another trend students brought to class was chunky platform boots, ditching the Nike sneakers



DTH DESIGN/WREN SILMAN

or Adidas Gazelles. This kind of boot is often paired with a pleated or plaid skirt for subtle private-school vibes, and some students even added leg warmers for an extra personal touch.

This year also brought a surprise return of the poncho-shawl-hybrid. Often crocheted, these airy, colorful articles evoke the essence of early 2000s pop stars like Hilary Duff, bringing a

wave of lighthearted nostalgia. They are whimsical, quirky and effortlessly easy to throw on for an outing.

“Barrel jeans — a petite girl’s worst nightmare — also made an appearance.”

On the other side of the hanger, one style that is not new but saw a revival this year was the coquette aesthetic. This trend saw its resurgence, likely due in part

to Sabrina Carpenter’s new album “Man’s Best Friend.” Carpenter has altered and re-popularized it through her signature looks with staples like babydoll tops, lace, ballet flats and Mary Janes — all soft, feminine pieces that define the trend’s playful charm.

Additionally, business-casual pieces have become everyday class-wear — blazers, dress pants, button-ups, skirts and even ties

now fill lecture halls. And, of course, none of these looks are complete without the signature Longchamp bag.

However, dressing up is not for everyone — clean-chic girl outfits have taken over like a pandemic. This trend is heavily influenced by many TikTok creators and well-known celebrities like Hailey Bieber. Sweat sets also remained hugely popular this year for their comfort and ease. A sweat set is simply a matching two-piece outfit — a sweatshirt paired with sweatpants — making it an ideal choice for everyday, low-effort wear that still looks put together.

For an unexpected cherry on top, wired headphones are making a full comeback this year, a surprisingly nostalgic twist in audio style. Seen on celebrities like Lily-Rose Depp, Bella Hadid and Addison Rae, the trend taps into the Y2K revival and a renewed love for vintage tech. The chic factor comes from the blend of nostalgia and aesthetic appeal: wired headphones channel the early 2000s and feel “retro” to Gen-Z. Or, maybe it is simply the Bella Hadid effect — once she is photographed wearing something, it instantly becomes fashion canon.

Fashion is becoming a blend of past and present. This year’s style landscape primarily encompassed early-2000s, but no matter what, as trends collide at places like UNC or across social media feeds, one thing remains consistent: fashion is one of the strongest forms of self-expression.

X: @dthlifestyle

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Opinion

The Daily Tar Heel

Opinion Editor reflects on 2025 coverage



DTH/CONNOR RUESCH

DTH Opinion Editor Sydney Baker poses for a portrait at the DTH office on Franklin Street on Aug. 14.

By Sydney Baker
Opinion Editor

This year, there hasn't been much to opine on — the Trump administration had little controversy, UNC's Board of Trustees did an excellent job and our Belichick-led football team was fantastic.

Just kidding.

In 2025, the world basically exploded with content, providing nourishment for our hungry little Opinion Desk. This past year, we've had columns that force you to think: "Where the hell is Lee Roberts?" and "'Off-campus freedom' is ongoing exploitation." We've had satires that make you laugh: "National guard cracks down on crime in Carrboro," "Costco is coming to campus" and "Sincerely, the rats — a letter of gratitude to UNC laundry rooms." We've even had some to make you cry, like "My family lived through a dictatorship. The detention of Mahmoud Khalil is *deja vu*" and "Hope is a discipline — Jane Goodall's farewell to a fractured planet."

The Editorial Board has tunneled through major news, including the presence of immigration enforcement in the Triangle, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program cuts' impact on the state and UNC's 'AI Space Race' endeavors.

As a non-reporting desk, our corner of the newsroom occupies a unique position. This year, we strove to publish content that sparks discourse and content that we, as editors, disagree with. We strove to meticulously fact check. We strove to platform voices outside of the newsroom through guest essays.

Above all, we strove to preserve free speech in student journalism amid federal onslaughts on the First Amendment. You may not always agree with what writers on this desk have to say. But in adherence to one of Voltaire's most potent convictions, we all must defend to the death the right to say it.

X: @sydneyj_baker

EDITORIAL

The Editorial Board's fall semester in review



DTH DESIGN/KENDYL THOMAS

By The Editorial Board

Every Tuesday, the Editorial Board gathers to deliberate on the week and everything that comes with it — the crises, the successes, the complaints of the student body. The diverse perspectives of each board member converge to capture the niche and the nuance of current events.

This semester in particular has been packed with controversy. The following is a critical reflection of our own coverage from the past three months: our accuracies, our weaknesses and how we hope to improve in the future.

"Resist the bystander effect. Stand for your neighbors."

Our neighbors are in danger. Recent federal actions, including ICE raids, the suspension of SNAP benefits and the EPA's proposal to gut the Clean Water Act, threaten to harm the most vulnerable members of our community.

North Carolinians' response to the recent ICE raids has demonstrated our state's willingness to act. ICE and its collaborators have faced impassioned, organized resistance across North Carolina in the form of protests, mutual aid organizations like Siembra NC, and networks of warning systems run by thousands of volunteers. This is exactly the activism that we called for in our article. Maybe next time, we can approach our calls to action with a lens of trust rather than a lens of doubt.

"We condemn the revocation of BSM's 'co-ownership' to the Upendo Lounge"

In August, the University revoked the Black Student Movement's co-ownership of the Upendo Lounge in compliance with federal anti-DEI policies.

Though the justified outrage surrounding this reported story and our editorial happened in mid-October, many of the meetings that facilitated this revocation actually occurred in August. In writing this editorial, we failed to offer much coverage or insight into the goings-on of the Black Student Movement since the time of the actual revocation — including how they initially responded, their plans for the future and any updated communications they've had with the University since then.

"The Daily Tar Heel stands with the Indiana Daily Student"

In October, Indiana University ceased the print edition of the Indiana Daily Student — a warning shot for every student newsroom in the country.

In hindsight, our editorial could have gone further than solidarity. We framed the issue as an urgent national pattern, which it is, but we should've capitalized on the opportunity to more fully interrogate UNC's own vulnerabilities and history with administrative pressure. We briefly mentioned The DTH's past; however, we could've given our readers a clearer sense of how close we've come to similar threats and how precarious student press freedom still is.

The biggest gap to cover was perhaps interrogating what true solidarity demands of us moving forward — not just a statement, but a plan. If we're going to champion press freedom, we should also be ready to defend it with more than prose.

"UNC must be cautious in the 'AI Space Race'"

We wrote this editorial in the middle of a semester that is arguably the most AI-forward semester UNC has ever had.

Our critique in this piece

was specific, targeting a lack of a standardized AI policy in the classroom and the overzealousness of AI inclusion into every public-facing facet of the University; our suggestions for improvement, however, lacked such specificity. We said the University's approach to artificial intelligence was "reckless," but we didn't offer an alternative for what risk-averse, careful implementation should look like at UNC. Subsequently, in this piece we had the opportunity to — but opted not to — research competing universities' approach to artificial intelligence implementation. We could've examined these more responsible policies that our university could have adopted, which would have further grounded the piece in a research-focused, realistic lens for this futuristic dilemma.

"When our government chooses to starve us, we must keep each other safe"

This editorial was published during the government shutdown, when the hold on SNAP benefits was just beginning to take effect. We knew there was a strong chance that the shutdown could end and benefits would be restored, but we felt that the situation was still worthwhile to write about.

The argument and tone of this piece are very similar to other editorials we've written this semester, specifically regarding the sentiment of people pushing back against the actions of an inflamed right-wing. We're not searching to find stories that fit this narrative; we're simply writing about the most relevant news from the week — most all of which, unfortunately, falls under this category. The reactionary right-wing takeover, for both UNC and the country, is the defining story of 2025.

However, going forward, we must ensure that our editorials don't

become a kind of hell-world Mad Libs: 'We as a community and our institutions need to fight back against _____ (fill in the blank with whatever terrible thing is happening at the moment). In the future, we will strive to find new ways to write about these topics in a way that avoids redundancy while still being forceful and honest.'

"Dear Carolina Community, the University will not protect you from ICE"

In our final editorial of the semester, we addressed the surge of ICE activity in the Triangle and the University's callous response to a rightfully concerned community. While the presence of Border Patrol in Chapel Hill and Carrboro ultimately remained low compared to the hundreds of arrests in Charlotte and Raleigh, the fear that many students, faculty and our local community felt was tangible.

At a time when state and local officials were speaking out against an aggressive federal agency with a track record of violating constitutionally protected rights, it was right to condemn the University's silence.

However, we missed the perspectives of the largest stakeholders in this issue: the immigrants and people of color who are the primary targets of these raids. We wrote about the potential harm, but we did not reach out to the people at risk of illegal assaults by federal agents.

Our call to action also could have been more specific. We questioned the University's verbal "neutrality," but we also could have interrogated what kind of realistic commitment we expect. In the future, we must demand that the University commit to dedicating tangible resources we know it can provide for students fearing for their safety.

X: @dthopinion

SATIRE

A guide to non-controversial holiday dinners in 2025

By Sydney Baker
Opinion Editor

Holiday dinners are supposed to focus on the very scripture of a HomeGoods pillow: family, love and laughter. Not politics. Not controversial celebrities. Not a contentious debate. So, I've compiled a cornucopia of events from this year that are perfectly permissible to discuss with your family this holiday season at the dinner table.

Before getting into some of the really fun topics, it's always a good idea to start with a conversation appetizer. An ice-breaker. There are a myriad of quick discussion starters to try: Do you really know what critical race theory means? Who's currently exploring their gender identity? Aunt Susan, are you on Ozempic? Is this a cruelty-free turkey? These simple questions will alleviate any tension, ensuring the rest of the dinner will go swimmingly.

Now, onto the entrées.

Topic #1: The American Eagle Sydney Sweeney campaign

Remember that dress in 2015 that the internet argued over whether it was blue and black or white and gold? The American Eagle ad with Sydney Sweeney's jeans is sort of the same thing — some view it as Nazi-esque propaganda, while others see it as a bad pun. Everyone in your family knows her, from your 20-year-old cousin to your creepy 60-year-old uncle.

Topic #2: The Gulf of _____

For this conversation exercise, cut up some strips of paper and pass them around the table. Write "Gulf of"



DTH DESIGN/ISABELLA DUGARTE-CARRASCO

followed by a blank space, and have everyone fill it in. It's really exciting to read the creative things your family will write down out loud. For example, President Donald Trump played this game in February and came up with "Gulf of America." To have an even better time, share that interesting tidbit at the beginning of the game and let the merrymaking ensue!

Topic #3: The 2026 Super Bowl halftime show announcement

To kickstart this discussion, start by playing some Latin pop from the other

room, and continue adjusting the volume until it sparks a racist remark from Grandma. Then, ask your family how they feel about this year's Super Bowl halftime show headliner announcement from September, and whether they think Bad Bunny is an American (just prepare in advance to hear answers based on opinion, not fact). For even more outrageous, harmless fun, throw in a comment about the administration's promise to send ICE to the show; what could bring a family together more than discussing the people being torn away from their families?

Topic #4: Charlie Kirk

If your aunt starts talking about something really controversial, like the United States ending production of the penny, you can dodge that bullet by talking about something far less contentious: the death of Charlie Kirk. Or, see if anyone has thoughts on "The All-American Halftime Show" announcement from October, organized by Turning Point USA. This is an excellent time to turn off the Latin pop in the living room and start playing the festive holiday song "We Are Charlie Kirk."

Instead of arguing, everyone will start dancing like the characters in "A Charlie Brown Christmas" — except your family is starring in "A Charlie Kirk Christmas."

Topic #5: The Epstein files

For non-controversial family dialogue, always remember the three Ps: Politics, Parties and Pedophiles. Luckily, all three of these things converge in just one topic — the Epstein files. Nobody wants to talk about work emails over the holidays, but sometimes the boring conversations beat the heated ones. And as an incredibly low-stakes subject, this one is great for initiating a rich dialogue between your racist, creepy uncle and your asexual cousin.

Topic #6: Israel and Palestine

The holidays, for many people, are often times of faith and blessing. There's no better time than now to bring up one of the biggest religious events going on in the world: the genocide in Gaza. For a lighter conversation on a Thanksgiving-themed genocide, you can also discuss the colonizers' mass slaughter of millions of Native Americans.

And for dessert, if these topics were a little too boring, try discussing Zohran Mamdani, Sabrina Carpenter's "Man's Best Friend" album cover, Pete Hegseth's leaked war chat, the government shutdown or the suspension of "Jimmy Kimmel Live!."

X: @sydneyj_baker

COLUMN

We got all this and more before GTA 6

By Esha Singaraju
Columnist

On Dec. 5, 2023, Rockstar Games announced that Grand Theft Auto VI would finally be released in 2025. After a decade of waiting, the internet briefly united in hope. Then, in classic Rockstar fashion, that hope evaporated. The "2025" window quietly shifted to fall 2025, and then, just two weeks ago, the company confirmed yet another delay — this time to late 2026.

At this point, the only thing more predictable than a GTA delay is the meme it inevitably revives: "We got [X] before GTA 6."

And this past year, it feels like we got enough "X" to fill an entire bingo card.

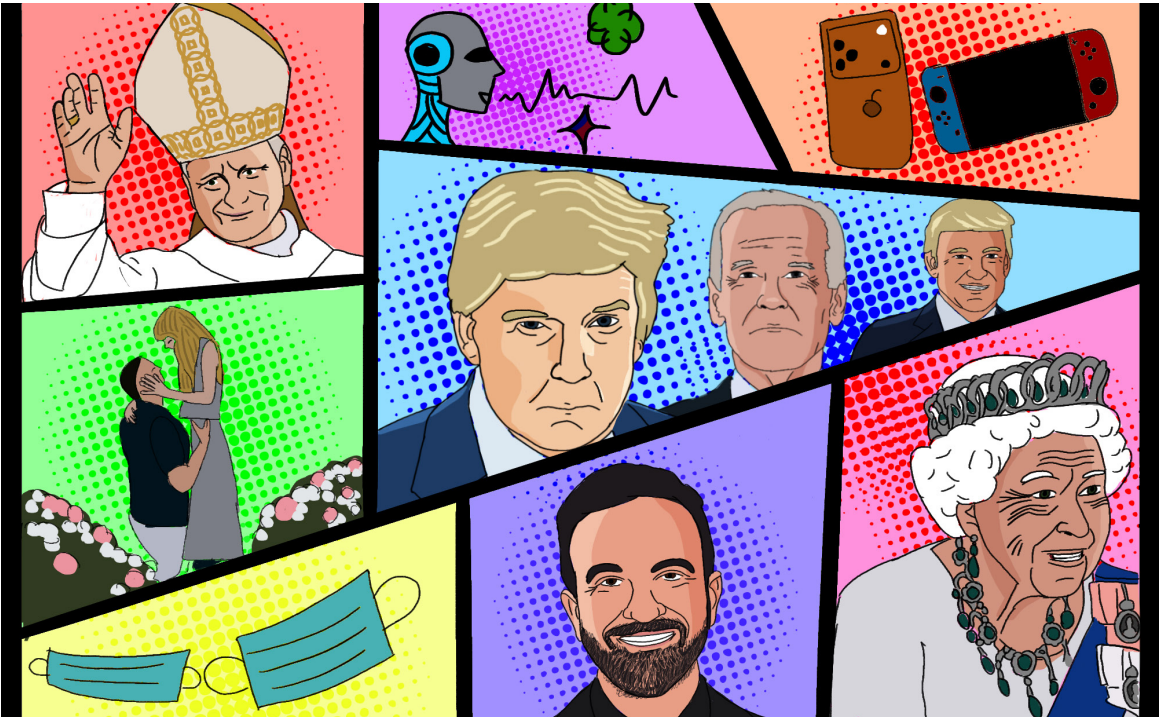
We got Bill Belichick at UNC before GTA 6.

In a twist that made the timeline officially fold in on itself, UNC replaced Mack Brown with Bill Belichick. The man who built the Patriots dynasty showed up in Chapel Hill wearing Carolina Blue, calmly discussing name, image and likeness strategy. He even brought out an old UNC sweater of his father's from the 1950s. One day he was mumbling through post-game interviews, the next he was walking past the Old Well.

We got Zohran Mamdani as NYC's mayor before GTA 6.

Zohran Mamdani, a progressive 34-year-old assemblyman from Queens, launched what looked like a long-shot mayoral run, and then won.

First, he defeated Andrew Cuomo in the 2025 Democratic primary. Then, in November, he became the 111th mayor of New York City, and the city's first Muslim and first Ugandan Indian mayor.



DTH DESIGN/CAMILA GARRIDO

We got a math-major Pope before GTA 6.

Cardinal Robert Prevost, an American from Chicago with a degree in math from Villanova, was elected Pope Leo XIV in May 2025. A STEM Pope. A Pope who has almost certainly done differential equations homework. A Pope who, if we begged hard enough, could probably explain eigenvectors.

We even got MrBeast on UNC's campus before GTA 6.

One viral TikTok rumor and Chapel Hill turned into a live-action stampede. Students sprinted across Polk Place. Scooters were abandoned mid-sidewalk. And then it turned out to be true: MrBeast did show up, surprising a business class and handing one student \$30,000 in tuition money. When MrBeast said "jump," half

the University said "how high (and is there a cash prize)?"

But outside of these headlines, the smaller campus shifts were just as memorable.

Construction around campus changed pathways seemingly overnight. An interim chancellor stepped in from the finance world, reshaping the administrative landscape. Dining halls rolled out new menus and formats. Meantime at the Junction opened, and unexpected snow flurries turned into brief, excited gatherings in the quad.

Sports eras closed and new ones began. Student routines shifted, adjusted and shifted again. It felt like an entire year of movement, big and small.

And the more you think about these "We got [X] before GTA 6" moments, the more they stop sounding like jokes and start sounding like markers — and reminders of how much can

happen in a year when no one is paying attention to the "big" thing they thought they were waiting for.

So this Thanksgiving, no, we won't be sitting around watching GTA 6 load on the TV. But maybe that's okay. Delays aren't always disappointing. Sometimes they create space to notice everything else: the unexpected news, the changes you couldn't have predicted, the stories you'll look back on and realize were more interesting than the thing you were waiting for in the first place.

Honestly, if the past year is any indication, who knows what other incredible nonsense will unfold before the next supposed release date rolls around. If Rockstar wants to take its time, fine. The world, and Chapel Hill, are doing a perfectly good job keeping us entertained in the meantime.

X: @dthopinion

QuickHits

Wilson Can't Stop

Caleb Wilson is sick. There's something wrong. Recently, Campus Health diagnosed him with a very serious condition: he's addicted to dunking. He CANNOT stop. His teammates have held an intervention. Hubert Davis has sent him to DD (Dunkaholics Danonymous). And his illness is simultaneously curing UNC basketball.

10 a.m. Ludacris

In October, Ludacris headlined a Chapel Thrill Concert Series event, and it was fantastic. Nostalgic. Riveting. And — it was at 10 in the morning. Not so fantastic. Not so nostalgic. Not so riveting. He did play "Baby" twice, though.

No Hulu for Bill

Almost one year ago today, UNC announced Bill Belichick as our next football head coach. Immediately, we all took to our Instagram stories, posting this gleeful news like kids on Christmas morning. Santa was coming to town to save UNC football, with his 24-year-old elf in tow. But all we got was a steaming pile of coal. And no UNC football Hulu docuseries.

SATIRE

Three news stories you might’ve missed in 2025

By Radian Hong
Columnist

2025 has been eventful to say the least, but at least we have AI music and TikTok to get us through it. News cycles only last 24 hours these days — who cares enough about a foreign war to pay attention after the first week anyway? — but some key events are worth reflecting on after the fact.

Here are three stories that didn’t get the coverage they deserve.

1. Charlie Kirk died

Where to begin? There is no other middle-aged man who could fill his shoes — no one brave enough to take on college first-years in heated debate or to warn our impressionable kids about the dangers of “prowling Blacks” and affirmative action. Kirk once said that some gun deaths are “worth it” to protect our Second Amendment rights. This is true when it comes to the over 200 school shootings that have happened this year, but this tragedy crosses the line into “not worth it” territory. What I’m sure Kirk meant was that gun deaths of persons under the age of 18 are worth it.

Personally, I made sure to post about his death on all my socials to show the immensity of my grief. The families of students shot the same day in Colorado probably wouldn’t miss their kids nearly as much as the country will miss Kirk. They’re just children, anyway — their parents can just make more once we’ve banned contraceptives and abortion.

On the bright side, out of the wake of this tragedy has come a flourishing of the arts. Genius composers have harnessed the power of AI to write powerful odes to this American hero, with “We Are Charlie Kirk” reaching over 1 million streams on Spotify. I’m calling it now as the song of the year. In 2025, we no longer need creativity to make art — all it takes is a subscription to Udio. It’s democratic in a way.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDREW HARNIK/GETTY IMAGES

2. Zelensky didn’t wear a suit in his meeting with Donald Trump

So what if his country is at war? He still needs to show respect to the office of the American president. It’s Obama’s tan suit all over again.

Sure, thousands of Ukrainian civilians have died this year in the war, even more than last year. Sure, Trump said he would put an end to the war before he even entered office. What matters is that he is trying his best and he says he’s angry with Putin on social media. Zelensky should show his gratitude for Trump’s forceful tweeting by wearing his best Sunday clothes to see our regal and decorous president.

3. TikTok was banned, unbanned and who knows anymore?

We nearly escaped a nationwide crisis of TikTok withdrawals. Teenagers from Los Angeles to New York City were without access to affordable brain rot for some 14 hours earlier this year. One told The Daily Tar Heel she had to pay out-of-pocket for a VPN just to watch “get ready with me” videos from her favorite influencers and Subway Surfers gameplay.

There were even demonstrations at the Capitol in response to this drastic measure. The public outcry proves that Americans can do without health insurance and safe schools but not without

their daily dose of scrolling. In other news, millions of Americans are expected to lose health insurance over the next decade due to Trump’s “One Big Beautiful Bill Act.” But at least they can ask TikTok to diagnose their mental illnesses.

We really have our priorities straight.

As we head into the new year, we have a lot of important events to look forward to — Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce’s wedding, for instance. As a country, our New Year’s resolution should be to focus on the things that really matter.

The future is looking bright for America.

X: @dthopinion

COLUMN

Holding onto sanity throughout Trump’s absurdity overload agenda

By Madelyn Rowley
Assistant Opinion Editor

After 11 months of screaming “fire,” the voices of the sane, rational and sensible are going hoarse.

These days, early mornings in America are early mornings under the direction of a presidential pedophile. These days, evenings in America are evenings under the beckoning hand of a raging xenophobe. At every turn, “constitutional crises” and “descents into fascism” seem to warn of a never-before-seen level of disaster with the potential to rip at the very seams and fabric at the foundation of the country.

The information influx in one ear comes from the most educated among us, shedding light on this conflagration. “Trump Dares the Courts to Stop Him” headlines the New York Times Editorial Board in February 2025. Another: “Now is Not the Time to Tune Out.” A viral video in May: “We Study Fascism at Yale. We’re Leaving the U.S.” Then, “Donald Trump is trying to amass the powers of a king,” says J. Michael Luttig for The Atlantic in December.

But in direct defiance, our Chief Executive dares every day to look Americans in the eye and reject, point-blank, each accusation. In the Oval Office in August: “Maybe [Americans] like a dictator.” In a meeting in September, about the Epstein files: “They’re a Democrat hoax that never ends.” Top it off with AI-generated videos of sparkling, golden Trump statues on a freshly Westernized Gaza and fecal matter dropped on No Kings protestors, and the American constituency is presented with the greatest clash of information any of us has ever seen.

At face value, we know what this is: a pressure campaign to exhaust, confuse and obliterate the will of the American people. But when we’re faced with a barrage of smug denial and a bureaucracy that seems to pretend that nothing is out of the ordinary, reality seems to suspend itself in midair.

This is the single most defining characteristic of Trump’s first year of his second term. It’s a show of smoke and mirrors, one of absurdity overload, and all of his “success” hinges on it. This hellish hodgepodge of lies, preposterousness and flat-out incitement has left the American people

exhausted, unable to sift fact from fiction.

And that’s the trap.

This trap forces us to stay glued to our streams of moderated information, all to be sure we don’t miss the next constitutional crisis. In this, we become overwhelmed. We lose the ability to prioritize, analyze and develop our own politics. We lose the willpower to boycott, to organize, to vote, to protest, to write, to speak truth to power.

The one and only way to combat the suspension of reality is to immerse yourself in it. Behind the authoritarian touts of greatness is a justice system that is working, frantically, to curb the flow and block the illegitimacy of executive overreach.

Holding onto sanity in a climate designed to strip it from you requires the effort to memorize our successes. Those who have responded to his cruelty and ludicrousness with courage and conviction — they have names; we must know them as well as we know the rest of his vindictive, incompetent Cabinet. Judges John Coughenour, Deborah Boardman and Joseph Laplante blocked and rejected Trump’s attempt to end birthright citizenship. Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly issued a permanent injunction that blocked Trump’s attempt to require documentary proof of citizenship on the national voter registration form. Speak of them as if they have the same influence as Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Kristi Noem — because they do.

The Constitution does work, even still. It was not designed to be torn apart by one man, and this will not begin now. We must hold on to this assurance. Without it, we have nothing.

Without it, the weary will overtake the willing. Without it, the grief slowly embedding itself in the character of everyday Americans will become a parasite, gnawing at our willpower and our resolve. Without it, we can do nothing but stare dead-eyed into a gaping void of merciless, godless gun violence, of dead Palestinians under rubble, of migrant mothers stripped screaming from the arms of their children and say, “I don’t think there is anything I can do.”

Without it, he will win.

X: @dthopinion

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Sports Editor reflects on 2025 coverage



DTH/CONNOR RUESCH

DTH Sports Editor Matthew Maynard poses for a portrait at the DTH office on Franklin Street on Aug. 14.

By Matthew Maynard
Sports Editor

What a year it's been for UNC sports.

Women's lacrosse won its fourth national title. Baseball won the ACC Championship and made it to the Super Regionals for the second straight year. Women's tennis' Reese Brantmeier won the NCAA singles title.

Winning titles is a culture that defines North Carolina athletics, and it continued to do so this year.

Sure, men's basketball lost in the first round to Ole Miss in the 2025 NCAA tournament. UNC football had a horrific season under first year head coach Bill Belichick. Those certainly put a damper on the year for UNC fans.

But success isn't defined by just those sports. That's what makes North Carolina athletics so special.

The investment and attention to 28 varsity sports has ensured the Tar Heels are able to compete for conference and national titles in every sport.

I've been lucky enough to play a very small part of that. The Daily Tar Heel prides itself on being one of the few outlets — if not the only — to cover each UNC sport. From my time as a sports staff writer to my time now as sports editor, we've continued to do exactly that.

While a student-run paper, the most vital part of our job is eliminating the bias that might come with being students at North Carolina. That means reporting the hard truth — as we've done many times before — even if it doesn't always make people happy. There's a standard that UNC athletics has set and it's one The Daily Tar Heel holds it to.

This year, that standard has been met by multiple teams, win or lose. Men's and women's basketball are having great starts. Volleyball is back in the NCAA tournament. Field hockey made it to the Final Four.

As North Carolina continues to raise that standard, we'll be here to cover it. And for now, reflect on the successful year it's been for UNC athletics.

X: @mdmaynard74

EXCELLENCE

The DTH editors' athletes of the year

Knapp, Humphrey, Heck and Brantmeier had standout years

By Matthew Maynard
Sports Editor

and Beckett Brantley
Assistant Sports Editor

and Brian D'Aguanno
Assistant Sports Editor

and Ava Sharon
Deputy Photo Editor

UNC athletics has had a successful calendar year. But across each varsity sport, a few specific athletes stand out as the best of the best.

Here are The Daily Tar Heel sports editors' athletes of the year:

Jake Knapp — Baseball

After missing the 2024 season due to Tommy John surgery, Knapp had one of the best seasons in college baseball. He finally got the chance to be UNC's starting Friday night pitcher — the role he was supposed to assume pre-injury in 2024.

And Knapp showed why.

In 2025, the right-handed pitcher tallied a 14-0 record with 88 strikeouts and 16 walks. He dominated the ACC, winning Conference Pitcher of the Year en route to an ACC tournament championship. Knapp finished the season with an ERA of just 2.02, including a 2.00 ERA in ACC play.

The accolades don't stop there, though. His 14-0 record was the best in college baseball and the College Baseball Foundation named Knapp the National Pitcher of the Year. He was also named an All-American by four separate outlets.

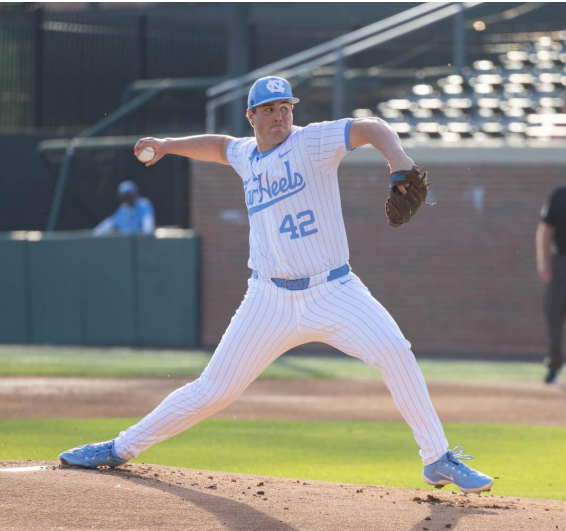
The former junior college transfer showed his dominance in the NCAA tournament Super Regionals, tossing 101 pitches in 7 innings of work as the Tar Heels pelted Arizona in the first game in Chapel Hill.

While North Carolina didn't make it back to the College World Series, Knapp was instrumental to UNC's success. Knapp was selected by the Chicago Cubs in the eighth round of the 2025 MLB Draft.

Ryleigh Heck — Field Hockey

It's hard not to be accomplished as a member of the UNC field hockey team, but senior forward Ryleigh Heck stands out among the talented group.

She led the team with 19 goals and 51 points this season — the most in her career. Heck has started every game she has played in during her four-year career, and for the fourth year in



DTH FILE/SIONA NAIK, AMANDA KIRKPATRICK, SOPHIA GRAY AND CASSIDY REYNOLDS

Graduate right-handed pitcher Jake Knapp (42), senior forward Ryleigh Heck (12), redshirt first-year attacker Chloe Humphrey and senior Reese Brantmeier.

a row, she was named to the All-ACC first team.

In the ACC tournament, Heck notched a goal and two assists and was named to the all-tournament team — something she has also accomplished in all of her seasons at UNC.

Over the summer, Heck competed with the U.S. National Team in the Pan American Cups. In a semifinal game against the host team Uruguay, Heck inserted a penalty corner then took a pass and floated the ball into the goal to take the lead. The game, which the U.S. won in a shoot-out, qualified the team for a spot in the FIH Hockey World Cup in 2026.

Chloe Humphrey — Women's Lacrosse

No UNC athlete had a better 2025 than Humphrey.

There also isn't an athlete at North Carolina more dominant at their respective sport than her. It's not even crazy to say that Humphrey has the chance to go down as the greatest Tar Heel athlete of all time by the end of her career.

The attacker was the best player on North Carolina's only national championship team during the calendar year. And not only was she

the best player at UNC, Humphrey was the top player in the country. As a redshirt first-year.

Truly uncharted territory.

In 22 games, Humphrey scored 90 goals, the most goals in a single-season in North Carolina history and also the most by any first-year in NCAA history for a single year. She added 28 assists for a total of 118 points on the year, the second most in a single season in program history. That production was good enough to win the Tewaaraton Award, given annually to the best player in women's lacrosse. Humphrey became the first Tewaaraton Award winner in North Carolina history and the first first-year ever to win the award.

Against Florida in the NCAA tournament semifinals, Humphrey scored a career-high seven goals to lead the Tar Heels to the national championship, which they won over Northwestern to cap off an undefeated season.

In her first season playing, Humphrey had the greatest individual season in UNC women's lacrosse history.

Reese Brantmeier — Women's Tennis

Just a few weeks ago, Reese Brantmeier won the 2025 NCAA Division I Women's Single National Championship, becoming the second Tar Heel to ever win the title. This accomplishment bookends her time with the Tar Heels, which she began as a first-year member of the 2023 NCAA national championship team.

Before a meniscus tear ended her run in the spring NCAA tournament, Brantmeier was the match-clinching point for the Tar Heels when they won their second consecutive ACC title.

Just in 2025, Brantmeier was recognized as an All-American in singles and doubles this spring and fall, the ACC Championship Most Valuable Player, and the ACC Player of the Year. She also excelled academically as the 2025 Academic All-America of the Year.

Among her athletic and academic successes, Brantmeier also found time to give back to her hometown community. Over the summer, she completed The Reese Brantmeier Project, the restoration of two community tennis courts in Whitewater, Wis.

X: @dthsports

BY THE NUMBERS

1

TEAM NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

3

INDIVIDUAL NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

3

ACC CHAMPIONSHIP TEAM TITLES

2

ACC REGULAR SEASON TITLES

2

FINAL FOUR APPEARANCES

4

WINS IN BILL BELICHICK'S FIRST SEASON

19

NCAA TOURNAMENT TEAM APPEARANCES

2

ACC PLAYERS OF THE YEAR

ANALYSIS

An in-depth review of Bill Belichick’s first season

UNC football went 4-8, sparking questions about future changes

By Brian D’Aguanno
Assistant Sports Editor

It felt as if all eyes in the college football world were on UNC in August. For the first time, seemingly in forever, North Carolina football was the focus.

The beginning of the Belichick era brought optimism and hope. A look into a brighter future. A break from the mediocrity the program became accustomed to over recent years.

Then, as fast as the hype was built, it all came crashing down in the season opener against TCU.

Eight months of anticipation gone in 60 minutes.

In Belichick’s first year at the helm, the Tar Heels went 4-8, ending their six-year bowl streak. On all levels, North Carolina failed to deliver on the hype branded with the overhauled coaching staff and roster. Still, rebuilding a program takes time, and that’s something to keep in mind when evaluating the future of the Tar Heels.

There’s no way around it. Four wins is not what the ninth highest-paid head coach in college football was brought in to do. As an eight-time Super Bowl champion, expectations were sky-high for Belichick and his staff, and for

good reason. The front office, including general manager Michael Lombardi, created the illusion that the team was going to compete right away. And that didn’t happen. Far from it.

In terms of what was promised before the year, it’s clear that UNC underdelivered. Not only in the number of losses, but the countless blowouts and uninspired efforts.

In particular, the beginning of the season was indicative of a program that was over its head. The complete inability for North Carolina to compete with Power Four opponents was jarring, with a 34-point loss to TCU, 25-point defeat to UCF and 28-point beatdown to Clemson in three of the first five games.

In each of those games, the Tar Heels were unprepared and looked disjointed. It took an adjustment period for Belichick and the new players to put together a respectable showing against a similar-level opponents.

On offense, Belichick made two critical mistakes — recruiting transfer quarterback Gio Lopez and promoting Freddie Kitchens.

Lopez, the transfer from South Alabama, was clearly not ready to start on a Power Four team. During the season, Lopez threw for 1,747 yards, 10 touchdowns and five interceptions, which are unacceptable numbers and ill-equipped for the high Division I level. Also, getting Lopez in the spring transfer portal didn’t allow time for

the redshirt sophomore quarterback to adjust and get acquainted with the rest of the offense.

While he improved as the season went on, landing Lopez at quarterback was a clear miss for Belichick and led to a stagnant, predictable and nonexplosive offense. Getting a quality starting quarterback is the first step this offseason to turning around the offense next year.

Kitchens, the other misstep, was a head-scratching decision when it was announced. While the former Browns’ head coach’s NFL resume was on brand with the rest of the coaching staff’s, Kitchens was clearly unfit for the role. As a tight ends coach last year, his promotion to offensive coordinator wasn’t the right move.

The offense never found its footing under Kitchens, ranking 129th out of 136 teams in yards per game and 126th in points per game. Moving on from Kitchens is paramount in the offseason, and, under the assumption Belichick can find a more competent replacement, should bode well for having an improved scoring attack heading into next season.

Those mistakes were terrible and if Belichick doesn’t learn from those them quickly, he will be on his way out of UNC.

Defensively though, the Tar Heels were better, showing that Belichick’s defensive acumen might translate to the college level. North Carolina



DTH/OLIVIA PAUL

UNC head coach Bill Belichick exits the field during the football game against N.C. State at Carter-Finley Stadium on Nov. 29. UNC fell 42-19.

ranked 41st in yards allowed per game and 68th in points allowed a game.

Yet, to the credit of the entire program, UNC turned it around. North Carolina had two wins over Syracuse and Stanford with one possession losses to California and a ranked Virginia team over the next four weeks. If the close losses end differently, there might be a different discourse and assessment level to Belichick’s first season in Chapel Hill.

It takes time to build a successful program and Belichick deserves a short grace period to turn the team around. Taking a look at

next season, North Carolina has hit the recruiting trail hard with the 17th ranked recruiting class for next season according to 247Sports. Despite the struggles, recruits still see UNC as an appealing option to play.

So, even though the program delivered an unsuccessful year this season, it will be worth it to play out the next two years of Belichick’s contract with guaranteed money.

Maybe the optimism will linger longer than the season opener next year.

X: @dthsports

BASKETBALL SEASON | REPORT CARD

Women’s basketball has standout defense, backcourt and bench

Evaluating the offense, frontcourt and more for the Tar Heels

By Eva Patel
Staff Writer

The No. 11 UNC women’s basketball team has kicked off the season strong, with its 8-1 record reflecting high preseason expectations.

The Tar Heels recently delivered an eclipsing performance with a perfect record at the 2025 Cancun Challenge, beating Columbia, South Dakota State and Kansas State by an average of 21 points.

While an increasingly challenging schedule will continue to put the Tar Heels to the test, here is a grade on their performance so far:

Offense: A-

UNC’s shooting numbers highlight its efficiency, converting 48 percent of field-goal attempts and 36 percent of 3-pointers. Senior guard Indya Nivar

leads the team with 12 points per game, but she is just one of five Tar Heels averaging double-digit points.

In Carolina’s commanding 94-48 win over UNCG, it shot an impressive 66 percent, the program’s highest accuracy in 40 years. First-year guard Nyla Brooks asserted her presence in that game with a career-high 18-point night.

Blowout performances are encouraging, but the offense struggled late against its biggest test so far, UCLA. The Tar Heels shot just 28 percent in the fourth quarter.

They also struggle to capitalize at the charity stripe, making just 61 percent of attempts.

Defense: A

The Tar Heels have held five opponents to 50 points or under, averaging 56 points allowed per game.

The defense is driven by Nivar, whose 40 steals in 9 games rank first nationally for total steals and sixth for steals per game. The team forces around 21 turnovers per game.

Still, North Carolina’s opponents are shooting 40 percent from the field, and with their low blocking ability — averaging just 3.3 per game — UNC’s rim protection is limited. Part of that has been playing without sophomore center Blanca Thomas, who recorded 25 blocks in her first season but has only played against UCLA this season.

Frontcourt: B+

UNC’s frontcourt has star potential in redshirt sophomore forward Ciera Toomey, who has stepped up this season, playing more minutes and scoring more points than last season. She leads the team with seven rebounds per game and recorded a career-high of 19 points against UNCG.

Senior forward Nyla Harris has been a strong addition this season, coming off the bench for most of the season to play solid minutes and averaging 10 points per game.

While they have delivered, Toomey and Harris are the only forwards currently in rotation on a guard-heavy roster. This lack of depth could raise

concerns if either is out at the same time as Thomas.

Backcourt: A

UNC has had a balanced and consistent contribution from an impressive rotation of guards. With Nivar playing at a higher level and the addition of Brooks, who has been strong out of the gate, UNC has offset the loss of guard Alyssa Ustby.

The backcourt features multiple versatile players, but Nivar has been historic. She recorded the second triple-double in program history with 13 points, 12 rebounds and 10 steals against South Dakota State.

Sophomore guard Lanie Grant is a familiar talent at the free-throw line, where she excelled last year and boasts an 86 percent rate this season.

Starters: A-

The starting five are well-rounded, led by Toomey in front, and supported by the backcourt around her. Sophomore guard Elina

Aarnisalo is the only new face, but she has warmed up quickly, averaging 10.8 points per game.

The starters make up for just over half of the team’s average point output, steady even as the bench has taken on significant minutes.

Bench: A

At first glance, it isn’t obvious which players come off the bench for UNC — a sign of how productive they are. Brooks leads the second unit in scoring, averaging 20 minutes per game. An ACC Rookie of the Week, she’s an emerging talent.

First-year guards Taliyah Henderson and Taissa Queiroz have also gotten solid minutes and boast shooting percentages over 50 percent.

In the front court, Harris elevates the second unit as a consistent double-digit scorer.

Overall: A-

X: @dthsports

Men’s basketball off to quick start despite depth problem

North Carolina opened with its first 6-0 record in nine seasons

By Dylan Stalter
Staff Writer

Just one month into the season, UNC men’s basketball already has a marquee win and has moved up to No. 16 in the AP poll.

The Tar Heels opened with their first 6-0 start in nine seasons, but Thursday’s loss to then No. 11 Michigan State brought fans back down to Earth — and exposed some glaring flaws with this year’s team. But that’s not to say that the early season hype was unjustified.

Here are letter grades for each component of the team so far this year:

Offense: B

After a total roster revamp, the North Carolina offense has transformed into

a much more efficient system. UNC has taken advantage of its added size, with much more action coming through the paint and high post.

While the paint has looked strong, the shooting from outside the arc has left much to be desired. The Tar Heels shot just 4-for-23 from 3-point range in their loss to Michigan State, with the team often unable to capitalize on good looks from outside.

Defense: B+

Despite losing their best perimeter defender in senior guard Seth Trimble just two games into the season, UNC has held its own on the defensive end. Ranked 33rd in KenPom’s adjusted defensive efficiency, the Tar Heels have been able to turn up the pressure when needed.

First-year forward Caleb Wilson has been a standout with his defensive effort, averaging three stocks — steals plus blocks — per game and always the first on the ground for every loose ball.

Frontcourt: A

Last year’s roster only had two players 6-foot-10 or taller. This year’s has three in the starting lineup alone. While Wilson has been one of the most electrifying players in college basketball — averaging just under 20 points and 10 rebounds — junior center Henri Veesaar might arguably be the most impactful addition.

The 7-footer has been a post anchor on both ends of the floor, while also connecting on nearly 43 percent of his three-point attempts.

After experiencing firsthand last season how a lack of size could cost them, UNC has undergone a complete 180. Depth remains a cause of concern, but at full strength, the Tar Heels’ frontcourt is proving to be a serious problem for opponents.

Backcourt: B

In his limited action this season, Trimble showcased his strong ability

to attack the rim. In his place, junior guard Luka Bogavac has brought in a versatile skillset — scoring at all three levels and showing off his playmaking ability. His shooting can be streaky, though, and UNC’s offense has noticeably cooled at times when he’s off the floor.

Junior guard Kyan Evans has shown glimpses of his facilitating ability at the helm, but he’s struggled to find aggressiveness as a scorer so far.

Starters: B+

While only two games were played with the fully healthy starting lineup, the win over Kansas showed this unit’s ceiling. The Tar Heels have multiple scoring options and have been able to take advantage of different matchups.

With Wilson starting on the wing, not only is UNC able to exploit size mismatches, but utilize the extra size for second-chance scoring. Bogavac has held his own in the meantime,

and Trimble’s return should only reinvigorate this starting lineup.

Bench: C+

The team will be considerably deeper at full strength, but until then, the rotation is stretched quite thin.

When Veesaar sat with foul trouble in the Michigan State game, the gap in the front court became clear. Sophomore center James Brown was scoreless in his seven minutes with a -10 plus/minus, while sophomore forward Zayden High has yet to find efficiency in his minutes off the bench so far.

On the other hand, first-year guard Derek Dixon provided a spark in the win against St. Bonaventure, showing flashes of his scoring abilities when his number was called.

Overall: B

X: @dthsports

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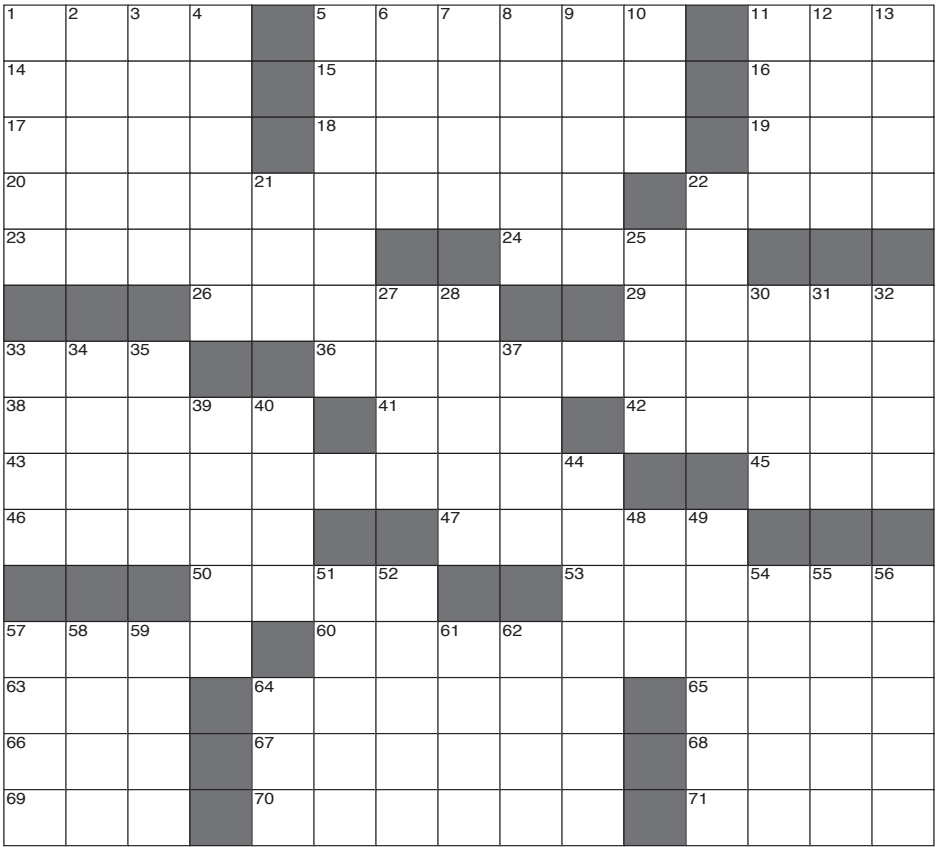
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“Reflection Time”

This week’s puzzle was created by Brigit Pierce,
The Daily Tar Heel Crossword Editor.
Brigit is a junior studying Economics.

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ACROSS

- 1 Machine at a 15-across
- 5 Slowly acclimate
- 11 Syringe amts.
- 14 Rice-a-___
- 15 Game room
- 16 42-across costar, to fans
- 17 ___Mysteries (children’s series with alliterative titles)
- 18 Raised
- 19 Chapel Hill restaurant and bar on Franklin, for short
- 20 ***Horse bedding blemishes that may be treated with salicylic acid
- 22 Bubbly drink?
- 23 Reach an altitude of
- 26 Craige and Spencer, e.g.
- 29 Removes from office
- 33 Queen Victoria’s preferred dog breed
- 36 ***Dug up jean material
- 38 Author of “Becoming” and “The Light We Carry”
- 41 Fish variety, or a first-person shooter video game if used as an abbreviation
- 42 Elphaba in “Wicked: For Good”
- 43 ***Kingly beer variety
- 45 Cool, to gamers
- 46 Identity associated with a pink, blue and white flag
- 47 Like disparaging comments
- 50 Debtor’s letters?
- 53 Heart parts
- 57 With up, admit to
- 60 ***Easily fooled water brand sourced from the Alps
- 63 Mood music genre
- 64 “Gosh darn it!”

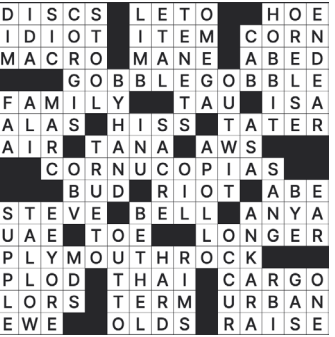
- 65 Obsessed with
- 66 Metal associated with a “Wizard of Oz” character
- 67 Time many take their first steps
- 68 Jazz improvization
- 69Franklin St. burger shack
- 70 Reflective surface, or what the ends of the starred clues are in relation to the beginnings
- 71 Huge musical successes

DOWN

- 1 Synonym for rude that become a rude person when the first two letters are taken away
- 2 Game for which you can buy tickets at the gas station
- 3 Oscars 2025 best picture winner
- 4 Emerald City ruler
- 5 Song you can’t get out of your head
- 6 L x W, for a square
- 7 “The Lion King” villain
- 8 3rd planet from the sun
- 9 i.e., unabbreviated
- 10 Nickname for Edward
- 11 Hard to find pattern
- 12 Cancer zodiac symbol
- 13 JoJo from Dance Moms
- 21 Org. regulating global commerce
- 22 Sadder
- 25 Most frequent, statistically
- 27 Flaky rock
- 28 Makes out, in England
- 30 Scissor onomatopoeia
- 31 Pioneering company in

- TV recording
- 32 Urban air pollution
- 33 Cruise ship stop
- 34 Ridesharing option
- 35 Lady of pop
- 37 Garden famous for its apple
- 39 Counterpart of pedis
- 40 “To add on...”
- 44 Airplane mechanic Rosie, for one
- 48 Daniel ___ Kim
- 49 Language invented by Tolkein
- 51 Eel on a sushi menu
- 52 Less crazy
- 54 Leonardo da ___
- 55 Seriously bother
- 56 Bratty kids
- 57 Greek cheese
- 58 Man’s name that spells a fruit backward
- 59 Male descendants
- 61 Lab assistant in some “Frankenstein” adaptations that doesn’t appear in Mary Shelley’s novel
- 62 Wine, in Italy
- 64 Beaver’s construction

Answers to “Winner, Winner, Turkey Dinner!”



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Horoscopes

Today’s Birthday:
December 3, 2025



Having a December birthday can be tough, especially when everyone is focused on taking finals and getting home for the holidays, but you deserve to be celebrated on your special day. You’ve come so far this year, and now, things will be finally looking up. So be proud of yourself. Put on that outfit you’ve been dying to wear, get a nice dinner with friends and make some memories to carry you into next year.

To get the advantage, check the day’s rating: 10 is the easiest day, 0 is the most challenging.

- ARIES**
Today is a 6 — There’s nothing like the mall at Christmastime. Get your friends together, do some window shopping and enjoy some overpriced food. But be sure to avoid anything with noodles.
- TAURUS**
Today is a 4 — It’s time for us all to admit it: Underneath the Tree by Kelly Clarkson is objectively a better song than All I Want For Christmas is You by Mariah Carey. You know it, and so do I. Someone will want to talk to you about this topic this week.
- GEMINI**
Today is a 2 — Sure, you’ve tried and failed to keep a new years resolution for the last decade, but this is the year you will finally stick with it. Come up with the most ambitious resolution yet.
- CANCER**
Today is a 0 — Sit down with your friends and family this holiday season to watch the best Christmas movie of all time: Bevely Hills Cop.
- LEO**
Today is an 8 — Give your loved ones a gift they’ll treasure for a lifetime: a crisp issue of The Daily Tar Heel’s Year In Review issue, fresh off the printer. They will love it.
- VIRGO**
Today is a 4 — Visiting family? Spice things up a little. Ask each of your relatives for their pronouns when you see them. You’ll be surprised at how they respond.

- LIBRA**
Today is a 9 — This holiday season, support your local Mexican restaurant. Guacamole sounds great right now, and it’s green like a Christmas tree!
- SCORPIO**
Today is a 10 — You’ll get all your friends together to make the best gingerbread house this town has ever seen. It won’t work. There will be frosting everywhere and you will realize that maybe home construction isn’t for you.
- SAGITTARIUS**
Today is a 1 — Leave your Christmas lights up through January. It’s so dark and sad when they all get taken down, and you have an opportunity to be part of the solution.
- CAPRICORN**
Today is a 7 — You know that fight you had with your family at Christmas dinner last year? It WILL get brought up again this year. Make sure to plan out your argument to prove yourself right, once and for all.
- AQUARIUS**
Today is a 10 — Do anybody else’s parents fight every year about whether the Christmas tree should be topped with a star or an angel, or is that just me? Meet in the middle: top the tree with a random stuffed animal.
- PISCES**
Today is a 4 — Do NOT wait until Christmas Eve to make cookies. You will be so stressed out, and it is not worth it.

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The Daily Tar Heel

Enterprise Editor reflects on 2025 coverage



DTH/CONNOR RUESCH

DTH Enterprise Editor Aidan Lockhart poses for a portrait at the DTH office on Franklin Street on Aug. 14.

By Aidan Lockhart
Enterprise Editor

2025 has been a year of change for the Special Projects — sorry, Investigations — Desk. It was the first full year of our Desk’s dedicated investigative coverage, and though we swapped names, our goal has remained the same.

We’ve aimed to hold larger systems accountable; whether that be our University, our local government or our federal lawmakers. And let’s not forget our student government.

We started off the year strong with a months-long project on UNC’s Board of Trustees, diving deep into the ways these wealthy advisors exert their influence on the University. We covered everything there is to know about a trustee — how they get there, what power they hold and the systems that allow them to keep it.

We’ve tracked the trickle-down effects of Donald Trump’s second term in office, and how minority communities are feeling the impacts of his policies. We’ve done our best to keep up with all the money problems, whether those be federal funding cuts, a history of underpaid University workers or the loss of student financial aid.

And of course there’s always the School of Civic Life and Leadership, a legislatively-created school which has consistently defied the norms of governance and transparency.

While our Desk is still in its infancy, we’re gaining our footing and working hard to keep those in power accountable. There’s always more to do and more to dig into.

We know we can’t cover everything — but we’ll damn sure try. Here’s to another year of keeping our work a little less unfinished.

X: @dailytarheel

IMMIGRATION

Fear grips North Carolina Latino community

Trump wants ‘largest deportation operation in American history’

By Alli Pardue
Editor-in-Chief

Last month, federal immigration agents launched a large-scale operation in North Carolina. Also last month, Jane’s eczema flared back up.

The 19-year-old student at UNC said she had the skin condition when she was little, but it had mostly gone away — until now.

“I’m scratching the crap out of my legs,” she said. “There are scabs.”

Something else happened, too; she got her period — something she hasn’t had in over a year because of her birth control medication. She’s also had trouble sleeping, which has already caused her to miss a class.

As federal agents scour the state looking for undocumented immigrants, these symptoms demonstrate ways that stress has manifested in Jane’s body as she worries about her mother back in their hometown near Charlotte. Her mom lost her legal residency status in September when the Department of Homeland Security revoked Temporary Protected Status for Honduras.

“I told my mom, I was like, ‘I’m going to lay low, I’m going to keep my mouth shut, I’m going to be good. That way, no light gets shed on you because of me,’” Jane, who requested to remain anonymous to do just that, said.

Jane and her family are not alone. Across the state, fear is gripping the Latino community. And as fear rises, people like Jane’s mom are increasingly staying indoors.

On Nov. 15, DHS agents arrived in Charlotte to initiate what was deemed “Operation Charlotte’s Web.” Then on Tuesday, Nov. 18, they arrived in the Triangle.

Amid this activity, people in the Latino community have been staying home from work, as many fear being targeted by ICE raids in their workplaces. Businesses and worksites have closed temporarily, and kids have stayed home from school.

That Tuesday, 8.2 percent of students were absent from Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools. This was notably higher than the typical five percent absence rate, according to CHCCS Chief Communications Officer Andy Jenks. In Wake County, almost 11 percent were absent that Tuesday, CBS 17 reported. And as for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, around 20 percent — 30,000 kids — were absent Monday, Nov. 17, WUNC reported.

The fear keeping them from work and school stems from the increase in federal immigration enforcement and anti-immigrant policies pushed forward by President Donald Trump, who vowed to enact the “largest deportation operation in American history” in his second term.

This year, DHS has sent its Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents into Los Angeles, Chicago and now Charlotte, resulting in thousands of arrests. National outlets have reported that the Trump administration has issued daily arrest quotas as high as 3,000.

At UNC, students like Jane worry about the possibility of their undocumented family members being deported, struggling to focus on classwork and college life.

Leslie is another UNC student facing similar circumstances. Her parents, as well as several aunts, uncles and family friends, are undocumented immigrants from



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Jamie Sanchez, co-owner of the Franklin Street coffee shop Epilogue, poses on Tuesday, Dec. 2. behind an anti-ICE sign he put on the shop’s front door.

Mexico. They all live in Charlotte, where DHS agents have arrested 250 people since November.

Leslie also requested to remain anonymous so as not to draw attention to her family.

“It’s really distracting,” Leslie said. “I don’t know how to navigate this, because I just want to go home. I just want to go see my family. But I can’t, because who’s going to drive me? Who’s going to pick me up? And I can’t afford to fly or get an Uber there.”

As federal agents swept through Charlotte, her parents mostly stayed indoors, Leslie said. She said her dad is scared to drive her brother to school.

Her dad is the only one in the family who works, owning and operating a food truck. But most of his customers are Latinos, and, like him, they are wary of going out in public.

“He can’t go to work,” Leslie said. “He tried the first day that [federal agents] were there, and nobody came. Nobody was on the streets.”

Leslie and Jane aren’t just worried about their families; they themselves fear encounters with CBP and ICE. While they are U.S. citizens, they are scared of being racially profiled by immigration agents — which the Supreme Court recently ruled to allow in the case of Noem v. Vasquez Perdomo.

The lawsuit argues that specific characteristics — like a person’s race or ethnicity, the language they speak or accent they have, or low-wage jobs they may perform — are legally insufficient for reasonable suspicion of one’s immigration status.

But on Sept. 8, the U.S. Supreme Court voted presumptively 6-3 to grant a stay of the case, allowing immigration officers to continue the challenged tactics, for now.

“Now that racial profiling is legal, somebody could stop me just because my hair is curly and be like, ‘Where are you from?’” Jane said.

Recently, Jane said she’s been straightening her naturally curly hair, as well as carrying her passport around in her backpack. Leslie said she’s also been keeping her identification documents with her.

“Just the thought of encountering them and a misunderstanding happening really scares me,” Leslie said.

Jaime Sanchez, a Mexican-American who co-owns the bookstore and coffee shop Epilogue on Franklin Street, said he, too, carries documentation on him at all times.

“It’s scaring me to be here to be honest, even though I am a citizen, a legalized citizen,” Sanchez said.

Sanchez called Epilogue an “activist business.” He has been vocal about his views on ICE and the tactics they use, calling them inhumane and immoral.

And his views are loud and clear the minute you see the door of Epilogue. Signs on the door read “I.C.E OFF MY PROPERTY GET A WARRANT!” and “WE STAND WITH IMMIGRANT FAMILIES,” as well as documents outlining people’s rights.

Sanchez said he has trained his staff on how to respond if ICE were to enter the property. When CBP came to the Triangle in November, he said he even drove around Chapel Hill himself on the lookout for federal agents.

“I always have a line of ‘Is a business supposed to have an opinion?’ It’s a business, it’s not a people,” Sanchez said. “In this instance, I cross my line. This business does not endorse candidates; it’s a business, it’s not a person. But in a situation where my community is being hurt, I had to cross that big line that I have.”

Fear within North Carolina’s immigrant community didn’t start when CBP arrived in November. A slower retreat has been taking place over the course of 2025 — since Trump began his second term.

Karin Michel, Youth & Family Experiences Manager at the Chapel Hill Public Library, said it’s a “hard time to reach Latino communities,” and that people are scared to even come out to public libraries, since they are government buildings.

Earlier this year, an annual Hispanic Heritage Fiesta in Siler City was cancelled due to community fear of attending large public gatherings, according to the July 10 press release from event organizer El Vínculo Hispano.

El Centro Hispano’s own Hispanic heritage festival in Raleigh, Fiestas en la Calle, usually sees around 3,000 attendees, according to El Centro Hispano. But this year, no more than 250 people showed up.

For Hispanic community organizations like El Centro, this fear has translated into a rising number of people preparing for the worst. Anabel Rosa, the organization’s legal consultant, said requests for power of attorney documents have risen noticeably since Trump was elected.

These letters allow families to designate someone to make

decisions on their behalf if they are detained, deported or otherwise absent. Power of attorney letters are one of the primary legal services El Centro offers, as the organization cannot take on cases or provide legal advice, Rosa said.

“The immigration process is extremely complicated and lengthy,” she said.

Jane’s family is one of many trying to prepare for what could come. When they heard ICE was getting deployed in North Carolina, they went to their lawyer to secure a power of attorney document.

But that’s all they can do for now. Jane said they are “in limbo,” as she is 19 and cannot petition to naturalize her mom until she turns 21.

“That’s not the fault of this administration; that past administrations have just been putting a band-aid on it,” Jane said. “But it is the fault of this administration that they ripped the rug out from under us without giving us any other solutions.”

Some feel that under the Trump administration, people with anti-immigrant sentiments have felt more emboldened to speak out.

“We have lived in our neighborhood for over 18 years now, and we’ve recently gotten some neighbors who have followed my dad home, flipped him off and all that, yelled things at him,” Leslie said. “And it’s something that’s never happened before, even during [Trump’s] first presidency.”

Meanwhile, the immigrant community is growing quieter, laying low. This community is often “hush hush” about legal status, Jane said — a closed-lipped culture shaped by fear of information getting out.

That silence follows her and Leslie to UNC. Leslie said it’s been hard to find people to talk to, because she never knows who might misunderstand, judge or even target her.

But, spoken or not, the Latino community feels like they have a target on their backs — regardless of their citizenship status. Fear infiltrates their daily routines, their ability to work, drive, go to school or simply appear in public — activities that were previously mindless.

“[My parents] put on a brave face for me. They tell me nothing happened and they’re fine,” Leslie said. “But they’re really scared.”

X: @allipardont

DATA

New conduct system is stricter, more efficient

Staff-led Code finds students responsible at higher rates

By Aidan Lockhart
Enterprise Editor

Last year, the University announced plans to step away from its 100-year tradition of student-led conduct adjudication. After a full year of the new conduct system, data obtained by The Daily Tar Heel reveals it is stricter and more efficient than its predecessor.

The new professionally-led Student Code of Conduct replaced the student-led Honor System in August 2024. And, although students can still play a role in the new process, a recent policy passed by the UNC Board of Trustees limits their involvement.

From students to staff

The decision to transition from a student-led system was accompanied by multiple rationale from University administration.

A July 17 email from former Provost Chris Clemens and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Amy Johnson claimed that student cases were becoming increasingly complicated and lengthy — on average, cases were taking 100 days to reach a resolution.

The email detailed a plan to remedy these issues, in which the University would “shift the Student Conduct processes to a conduct board model that reflects national best practice,” which would be “guided by University staff to ensure consistency across cases.”

An anonymous member of the Honor Court told The DTH in July 2024 that the members learned of the University’s plans to restructure the conduct system two days before the email was sent. According to UNC’s Student Code of Conduct Policy, full authority for the regulation of student conduct is delegated to the chancellor. At the time, Lee Roberts was still interim chancellor.

The Student Code of Conduct went into effect on Aug. 16, 2024, with three professional staff members.

Jenni Spangenberg, director of Student Conduct since 2022, said in a July 2025 interview with The DTH



DTH DESIGN/MEG JENKINS

that the new system has delivered on many of the goals the office had set out to accomplish.

Spangenberg said the Code of Conduct now encompasses alcohol-related violations as well as drug, academic and non-academic violations. She said the office has focused on listening to feedback from students and increasing the efficiency of the conduct system.

According to data obtained by The DTH, cases under the last year of the Honor System took 126 days, on average, from initial report to adjudication. In the July 2025 interview, Spangenberg said the

Code of Conduct had “significantly reduced” the timeframe for case resolution to “within 20 to 30 days.”

The data shows the average case resolution time under the new system is 52 days. Although longer

“Student Conduct has taken the position that it’s not necessarily the professor’s responsibility to determine if the student is responsible or not.”

Devin Duncan
Undergraduate Student Government secretary

than the director’s estimate, this resolution time is still a significant increase over the old process.

This long adjudication time was a key reason for the switch. The July email claimed that cases contained “more nuanced legal concerns,” which created a significant workload for the students in the Honor System.

Undergraduate Student Government Secretary Devin Duncan, who serves in multiple roles under the new Code of Conduct, said having professional staff members involved in the process makes the system more efficient.

Many students were upset with the switch from a student-led to a professionally led system, largely due to the worry that they would no longer be judged by their peers.

Students do still play a role in the Code of Conduct process — however, a recent BOT policy dictates how many students can be involved.

In February, the board adopted the “Policy on Campus Gatherings & Related Student Conduct Matters.” A portion of the policy states that, while students — or neutral external adjudicators — may comprise a portion of a student conduct committee, there must be at least one campus administrator present. Further, the campus administrators must constitute a plurality of the committee.

Kendall Esque is the chief legal officer of The Office of Student Legal Council, formerly the Student Advocacy Network. She said that under this new policy, students are heard by more administrators and faculty than other students.

Students can still play a role in the process as student advisors. Every student alleged with violating the

Code of Conduct has the option to request a student advisor who will guide them through the process. Duncan and Esque both serve in this role, and said they feel it is an important and underutilized

aspect of the conduct system.

According to Faculty Council meeting slides obtained by The DTH, only 13 percent of students

referred to the Code of Conduct requested a student advisor.

Duncan said he doesn’t believe many students know they have the option to request an advisor and that there is “never a student that does not have any questions about the conduct process.”

“The 13 percent, to me, is really concerning,” he said.

Charging and responsibility

When the transition was announced, some students worried that a system led by professionals would be harsher on students — and according to the data obtained by The DTH, it is.

However, Spangenberg told The DTH in July — before the data was obtained — that there were no tangible differences in the severity of punishment for students.

“It’s very similar in terms of the types of outcomes that students get, as well as if they are accepting responsibility, or if they’re determined not to be responsible,” Spangenberg said.

From the Honor System to the Code of Conduct, the data shows a 16 percent increase in the number of charged undergraduate students who were found responsible for a conduct violation. The Office of Student Conduct did not provide The DTH with comparable data for graduate and professional students.

The percentage of students accepting responsibility, averaged across all academic cases, remained a steady 72 percent. In a December email to The DTH, Spangenberg wrote that there is not comparable data for non-academic cases.

After a student is referred to Student Conduct, they are provided with an initial notice, followed by

a preliminary investigation, which determines whether or not there is reasonable basis to move forward with a formal charge against the accused student. Charging does not mean that the student has been found responsible for a violation of student conduct, only that there is enough evidence for further investigation to occur.

After the full conduct process, a decision is made as to whether or not the accused student is found guilty for the alleged violation.

The percentage of students charged has remained relatively steady across the two systems. Under the new Student Conduct process, most categories showed lower charge rates. The exceptions were graduate non-academic cases, which showed a near-double increase from 45 percent to 86 percent.

And although charge rates have remained somewhat consistent, the number of total referrals — and, consequently, the number of students charged in every category — has increased with the Code of Conduct. Spangenberg said she couldn’t speculate on why the number of referrals has increased.

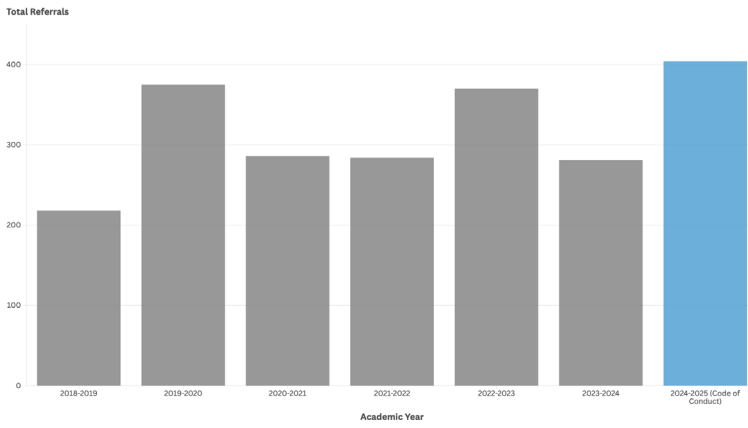
“It varies year to year,” she said. “We just take the referrals that we receive.”

Duncan shared a few possible causes for the increase in referrals. He said the increase could be the result of a few large cases. The large-scale case resolution process can occur when an incident involves five or more students — Duncan said that, in some cases, there may be 50 referrals for one specific incident.

He said the increased number of referrals this past year could also be attributed to an increasing number of cases related to artificial intelligence. Duncan said almost every one of the cases he has seen this year has “centered around AI.” These cases are complicated, he said, because UNC doesn’t have a University-wide policy on the use of AI in the classroom, and that there is “not really a reliable way to tell if someone has used AI.”

“I think instructors are just jumping to report people to Student Conduct, because Student Conduct has taken the position that it’s not necessarily the professor’s responsibility to determine if the student is responsible or not,” he said.

First year of Code of Conduct sees highest number of student referrals in seven years
Although referral totals fluctuate, the Code of Conduct saw more referrals in AY2024-2025 than the Honor System has in any one year since 2018.

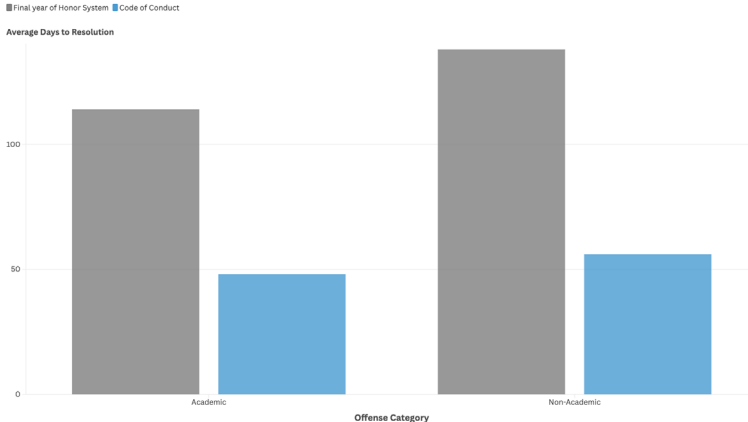


Source: UNC Office of Student Conduct • Totals reflect both undergraduate and graduate and professional referrals.

Data Visualization by Aidan Lockhart

DTH DATA/AIDAN LOCKHART

Cases resolved in less than half the time under new Code of Conduct
Average days from initial report to adjudication is more than halved for both academic and non-academic cases



Source: UNC Office of Student Conduct • Honor System includes referrals that were received prior to August 16, 2024, and resolved through April 2025.

Data Visualization by Aidan Lockhart

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