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En Route to Developing UNC Charlotte's Collegiate EMS

Marissa Canty, MBA, NRAEMT

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Nearly 600 9-1-1 calls requesting emergency medical services were made within the University of North Carolina at Charlotte

(UNC Charlotte) last year, making the university area the busiest servicing area in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Despite the demonstrated need for college-based EMS (CBEMS), the UNC Charlotte campus currently lacks such an agency.

Nick Maynard and Davida Ogbar identified the need for CBEMS to serve the second-largest university in North Carolina during the 2024-2025 academic year. Maynard and Ogbar met while volunteering as EMT-Bs at Idlewild Fire Department. Maynard approached Ogbar with the idea of founding UNC Charlotte's EMS agency.

"Some have shared stories of calling 911 and having to wait over half an hour for help to arrive due to county load. They described feelings of powerlessness and anger because they recognized how things could have turned bad had the incident been more serious. We've talked to others who have watched county arrive and have to search through buildings to find the right room because of a lack of familiarity with the layout of the campus," Ogbar has shared.

Since their initial brainstorming session, the National Collegiate EMS Foundation's Startup Coordinator, Dr. Joseph Grover, and the Southeast Regional Coordinator, Sarah Tarzone, have provided strong guidance to the UNC Charlotte Student EMS Initiative. "Dr. Grover even wrote a letter of support for us to show our Chancellor and senior admin," said Ogbar. They stated that the NCEMSF Staff have been a key source of support, helping them connect with other CBEMS at similar universities and access start-up resources and funding.

The UNC Charlotte Student EMS Initiative connected with student leaders at other North Carolina CBEMS agencies, including Mountaineer Medics (Appalachian State University), Duke University EMS, UNC-EMS at Chapel Hill, ECU, and Wake EMS (Wake Forest University EMS).

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Collaborating with other agencies provided insight into various operating models, best practices, and examples of agency documents to build from.

Maynard and Ogbar have been introducing the CBEMS program to key stakeholders, including the Office of Emergency Management at UNC Charlotte, the UNC Charlotte Human Resources Department, the UNC Charlotte Legal Department, and county partners such as Medic, CPCC, and Atrium Health. During meetings with these stakeholders, the primary focus was to demonstrate the need for CBEMS, build community awareness, and brainstorm ways to establish a mutually beneficial relationship among departments and the agency.

Unique to UNC Charlotte is its large student population and urban location with a high call volume. Identifying the best-fitting operating model for the agency was a critical task. "The goal of our program would be to blunt the effects of that high call volume so that our campus community is better protected in times of emergency," said Maynard. They hope to operate within the scope of practice of Basic Life Support (BLS) while serving UNC Charlotte with a brand-new UTV owned by the university's Office of Emergency Management. They share that they are currently working towards a formal agreement with a prospective medical director.

Recruiting enough members has not been a barrier to the agency's development. "Students are in love with this program both from a safety perspective and an opportunity perspective," Maynard shared. They have identified 6-8 certified EMTs/paramedics and several others in the certification process. However, these individuals have been unable to ride with other EMS agencies due to the need to balance academics with an EMS work schedule. If UNC Charlotte developed an EMS agency, these individuals expressed eagerness to join and provide care to their campus. The agency's name will play off the university's team, the 49ers - "Niner-1-1." In the future, they hope the agency can grow to expand its fleet, scope of practice, and membership capacity.

In April 2025, a roadblock was reached for the UNC Charlotte Student EMS Initiative after Maynard and Ogbar met with the Vice Chancellor for Business Affairs, Rich Amon. The two stated that their biggest challenge has been communicating with stakeholders about EMS, the scope of prehospital medicine, and the liability and cost implications for the university in association with the agency.

The UNC Charlotte Student EMS Initiative shared a press release on April 30th stating, “The university has reservations for starting a new program, citing cost, oversight, and liability. Furthermore, the university feels that the data has been relayed to them thus far, but does not adequately demonstrate the need for implementation of this program.” Despite the setback, they stated that they look forward to continuing their advocacy for UNC Charlotte CBEMS and to addressing the concerns of the university and students alike. “Because of the work that everyone is doing, the life of a campus community member will be saved.”

A past member of the initiative stated that since then, the initiative had continued to advocate for a collegiate EMS agency alongside campus stakeholders and supporters. In August 2025, the initiative officially reached a standstill. When the initiative paused, the UNC Charlotte EMS Club formed as an organization affiliated with the university, whose mission is to promote EMS careers and education. The UNC Charlotte EMS Club Board shared, “The leaders of the newly formed UNCC EMS Club wish to align with the university in this matter. The future of a campus EMS depends on a relationship with the university where both ends are fully involved and passionate about the cause. The UNCC EMS Club hopes to work with our school’s leadership in the future, and does not share the same position on the matter as the EMS Initiative.”

How can other collegiate EMS agencies best help support the development of UNC Charlotte’s CBEMS agency? Sharing your collegiate EMS experiences on their social media, signing their petition, and “having leaders in business or logistics from other universities with campus EMS programs reach out to our leaders to say ‘hey, we were scared too at first, but here’s how the program actually served our needs’ would mean a lot,” Ogbar said, “We can’t wait to come back as alumni in 10, 15 years and see the squad working as a robust, integrated part of UNC Charlotte. Having that vision illustrated tangibly by other squads in our state and out of our state helps the admin see the vision.”

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