The final Carolina Union Board of Directors meeting of the academic year was a changing of the guard as old leaders passed the torch responsibility to new ones. Outgoing board chair Jaylen Evans led the meeting wearing a cap and gown, and even turned the tassel as his tenure concluded. Evans, who steered the Union through unprecedented challenges this spring, is turning leadership over to Darian Abernathy, a rising senior who has held numerous leadership positions as a longtime Union student employee.

Via Zoom, Abernathy delivered an address to board members that shared her vision for the future. We are publishing her remarks in full:

First, I would like to congratulate you all on all of the hard work that you have accomplished this year. I realize that this is not the way anyone expected the academic year to end, but you all have shown me that even when things do not go according to plan, success is always possible. I want to also thank Jaylen and Alexandra for their guidance and support. They have gotten the opportunity to get to know me a little better these past few weeks, and they have consistently made me feel confident in my own abilities to step into this leadership role. Jaylen will be leaving behind a legacy that I will
honor and strive to uphold for the next year and instill in the Chairs to come.

As for next year, I have 3 specific goals in mind for how the Board of Directors will continue to support the mission of the Carolina Union:

I am excited to continue to build relationships with GPSF, especially when thinking of graduate and undergraduate relationships. Student Government, GPSF, and the Carolina Union have always been the centers for student led activism. My goal is to unify these efforts so that we can create synergy and give space for students in the Carolina Union. I also what to engage other student groups that the Union has not engaged with in the past, particularly voices that have been silenced by the university, and work on building a future with them as well.

Next, I hope to use student voices and surveys to advocate for the expansion of the current space. As the UNC population continues to grow, so must the services dedicated to serving them. I realize that this will be difficult and will not be accomplished without backlash. 1. Because coronavirus has altered plans with revenue and the functionality of the physical Union space. 2. We have been using the current space well and some may not see a need for change. However, I challenge those ideas by considering the evolution of the university itself. As the campus community grows, so does the physical campus space. The survival of the university depends on it, and so do we.

Finally, I want to find innovative ways to build partnerships across campus and throughout the organizations we serve. However, I don?t want to stop there. I want to build relationships with other student unions at our sister universities so that we can network and find creative ways to serve our students and share ideas that would help to support theirs. Surprisingly, with the current situation the world is in, I think that this is a beneficial time to start making these connections. We are treading new territory, and should choose to lean on each other. This could have a tremendous impact with supporting the previous goals. Allowing our network to grow will in turn create opportunity for the Carolina Community.

As COVID-19 continues to change the way we interact, I want to reassure you all of my commitment to the Carolina Union. To be honest, I am scared and nervous however, I do not see these as weaknesses. They speak to the caution, care, and humility that I will bring into this position. I am honored to be selected to lead this group of passionate leaders, and I know that we each are dedicated to seeing our constituents thrive. I am looking forward to working with many of you next year as we transition with next year?s BOD. Be on the look for updates and action items for our summer retreat and Fall Planning.

Thank you.

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