

# The Briar Wire

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On Jan. 1, 2025 at 12:00 a.m., Sweet Briar's iconic Bell Tower not only rang in a new hour, but a new year. In the following weeks, snow and ice coated campus ahead of the students' return, reminding us of the simple pleasures that winter brings. As we begin a new year in the College's history, we save space for the peaceful moments as we forge the next generation of minds we're privileged to encounter each day. Cheers to a new year!



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Sweet Briar Day, Hampton Roads, Va.

## Dear fellow alumnae and friends,

Welcome to 2025! I hope you have been able to successfully navigate the extreme weather challenges that have greeted us in this new year, from the fires in California to snow in Florida. Our hearts go out to all those affected by the fires, the hurricanes this fall, and any other weather-related situations.

A blanket of snow greeted the students as they arrived back to campus and the dining hall trays were out to continue the tradition of sledding down the dell. Another annual tradition is Sweet Briar Day celebrations, held around the country, and this year also in London, during December and January. The tradition began with alumnae clubs holding these events in December, but were extended through January to invite current students to attend while they are on break and offer an opportunity for fellowship in our alumnae clubs after the holidays. This year, we held 24 events with alumnae from the Class of 1952 to the Class of 2024. We are gratified that with all the challenges in the fall, so many fabulous hostesses stepped up to provide their local alumnae the opportunity to reconnect with their friends and make new ones. Along with our alumnae, spouses, current students, parents, and grandparents joined in these celebrations.

Sweet Briar has always had a close-knit community on campus, in America, and around the world. Our young graduates are so appreciative when they find a local community to be part of that supports them as they start the next chapter in their lives. Each city I moved to after graduation had a Sweet Briar alumnae

club that was there welcoming me and making it feel more like home. In today's fast-paced and challenging world, it is easy to lose touch with the people who played a significant role in shaping our lives. However, our alumnae community serves as a vital link that connects us, allowing us to share our journeys, celebrate our achievements, and support one another through life's challenges. It is inspiring to hear many stories of Sweet Briar alumnae rallying around an alumna and her family when there is a medical situation or other crisis that affects her or her family.

The Alumnae Alliance Council, through its working groups, helps connect alumnae of all ages to the College in meaningful ways both on and off campus, continuing to foster collaboration and mentorship. We are grateful for their leadership. To find out more about their work and how you can be involved, visit [sbc.edu/aac](https://sbc.edu/aac).

Thank you to each and every alumna who makes our external community so vibrant and helps our students and graduates (especially the most recent) in so many ways. We hope you will consider coming back to campus for Reunion from May 30 – June 1, especially if you are celebrating an anniversary year in the classes ending in 0 or 5. Registration has just opened at [sbc.edu/reunion](https://sbc.edu/reunion).

Warmest wishes for a great 2025,

Claire Dennison Griffith '80  
*Vice President of Alumnae Relations and Development*

## Beloved Biology Professor Named Outstanding Faculty Award Recipient by SCHEV

Each year, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) presents the Outstanding Faculty Awards, which are Virginia's highest honor for faculty at public and private institutions, recognizing their accomplishments in teaching, research, and public service.

Sweet Briar College is proud to announce that Dr. John Morrissey, professor of biology, Biology program chair, a Flora Cameron Crichton Fellow, and a two-time recipient of Sweet Briar's Excellence in Teaching Award, has received an Outstanding Faculty Award for 2025.

"This is the second greatest thing that has happened to me during my career, the greatest being that I have had the privilege of watching scores of students go on to do wonderful things," commented Dr. Morrissey. "One former student is a liver-transplant surgeon in Manhattan. Another earned her Ph.D. while

visiting the floor of the deep sea in the world-famous Alvin submersible. And so many others are now teachers, vets, nurses, and physicians, collectively impacting our society in ways that put my accomplishments to shame. Nevertheless, being chosen from so many wonderful members of the faculty by the administration as Sweet Briar's nominee, and being selected for this award by my peers around the state, is a compliment that is nearly inconceivable."

Dr. Morrissey and his students study the natural history of sharks, skates, and rays. They have studied lemon sharks in the Bahamas, a new species of gulper shark from the Cayman Trench, cownose rays in Chesapeake Bay, and chain catsharks in his lab. He is a lifetime member of the American Elasmobranch Society and the senior author of the bestselling textbook, *Introduction to the Biology of Marine Life*. Dr.



Morrissey holds B.A. and M.A. degrees in biology from Hofstra University and a Ph.D. in biology and living resources from the University of Miami.

"Dr. John Morrissey is a rare and remarkable faculty member," said Dr. Jeff Key, dean of the College. "He is both a globally recognized marine biologist and a gifted teacher. Working with Dr. Morrissey is a great privilege."

Nominations are made by these institutions and are then reviewed by a panel of peers. This year, 83 nominations were made, the panel of peers narrowed the field to 24 finalists, and a committee of leaders from public and private schools finalized the list of 12 recipients.

## Save the Date: Sweet Work Weeks

July 11-21, 2025: 10 Days Celebrating 10 Years



Come back to Sweet Briar this summer for our annual Sweet Work Weeks, when alumnae and friends volunteer to care for the College's buildings and grounds. Sweet Work Weeks projects include:

- Painting, indoors and outdoors (including dorms!)
- Weeding, trimming shrubs

- Planting
- Pressure washing
- Cleaning outdoor furniture
- Trail maintenance
- Much more!

When you come to volunteer for Sweet Work Weeks, Sweet Briar provides you with housing and

meals during your stay. You'll work alongside alumnae and friends during the day, and in the evenings, you'll have time to get to know each other and learn what brought you back to Sweet Briar as a volunteer!

Stay tuned for more information about how to register for Sweet Work Weeks.



## SWEET BRIAR DAYS

### Wilmington, N.C. Dec. 1, 2024

Carolyn Birbick Ownby '80 hosted  
alumnae at the Surf Club in  
Wrightsville Beach, N.C. for brunch.



### NJ/NYC/CT Jan. 5, 2025

Emily Wiley '07 and Jane Wiley '10  
hosted regional alumnae for lunch  
at Emily's home in New Jersey.

### North Texas Jan. 18, 2025

Hilary Cooper Cook '05  
welcomed alumnae to her  
home in Dallas, Texas for lunch.







### **Williamsburg, Va.** Dec. 15, 2024

Cindi Little Townsend '79 welcomed alumnae in the Williamsburg, Va. area to her home for a festive lunch.

### **Boston, Mass.** Jan. 11, 2025

New England alumnae, including Jane Sheehan '52, joined Lauren MacMannis Huyett '79, Kathy Upchurch Takvorian '72, and Jona Cumani '18 for a celebratory lunch.



### **Houston, Texas** Jan. 4, 2025

Houston alumnae met at Barnaby's Cafe in the Museum District for lunch.

### Sweet Briar Forever Month and March Days of Giving

**This year, Sweet Briar College is celebrating 10 years of prosperity during March Days of Giving!**

Exactly 10 years ago on March 3, 2015, the former Board of Directors of Sweet Briar announced that the College was not viable and would close. As you know, alumnae, faculty, students, and friends rallied and saved the College. The rest, as they say, is history. Sweet Briar's faithful constituents have been proving the viability of the College ever since. This March, we will be celebrating this commitment to perpetuity by raising \$1 million (or more!) during this 10-day giving initiative!

Each year, alumnae and friends of Sweet Briar make their gifts to the Sweet Briar Fund, the College's annual giving program to make the biggest impact. **Please remember that the Sweet Briar Fund offers NEW ways to support our students:**

- **Greatest Needs:** This unrestricted area of support provides critical and flexible funds that address urgent needs and enables the College to seize unique opportunities to support our young scholars today.
- **Student Scholarships:** This unrestricted area of support provides need and merit-based scholarships for talented students and allows the Financial Aid Office the flexibility to meet the needs of prospective students and recruit the best and brightest.

- **Academic Support:** These unrestricted funds support faculty salaries and academic development, the Student Academic Success Center, Honors Summer Research Program, Career Services, Grants for Engaged Learning (GEL), lectures and events, curatorial support for museums and galleries, and other institutional resources.

- **Stewardship of the Natural and Built Environment:** These unrestricted funds support the maintenance, preservation, and improvement of our 22 historic properties and 2,847 acres.

A gift of any size makes a difference, providing today's students with the resources and opportunities which make a Sweet Briar education unique.

**Many participants in March Days of Giving like to plan ahead for their gifts.** If you'd like to send a check in advance to count for March Days of Giving, please write "March Days of Giving" in the memo line. If you plan to make a gift of stock or by wire transfer, please ask your broker or wealth manager to include a note that the gift is for March Days of Giving, if possible. If you plan to make your gift by credit card, you may do so online at [sbc.edu/give](https://sbc.edu/give).

Finally, in addition to making your gift, **you can make March Days of Giving more successful by asking your classmates and friends to join you.** If you are an alumna and would like to encourage participation within your class, please reach out to **FIVE** of your classmates to ask them to join you in supporting the students at Sweet Briar. Thank you for supporting the College during this historic anniversary!

## Join us for March Days of Giving March 1-10!

Make your March Days of Giving gift online at [sbc.edu/give](https://sbc.edu/give)!

*On March 3, we will also celebrate 10 years of prosperity with the rose-planting ceremony at noon! Tune into the livestream on the College's YouTube channel. Details coming soon!*



# Faculty Lead Education Program to National Accreditation

Sweet Briar College's Teacher Education Program has been reaccredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP).

The Education program's path to reaccreditation was complex, making it a notable achievement. While Sweet Briar's small size benefits it in many ways, including fostering a tight-knit community with a dynamic classroom environment and close faculty-student relationships, it can sometimes lead to challenges, especially for its smaller programs.

The College's Teacher Education Program is required to be accredited by state and national entities. The Education faculty faced myriad hurdles over the past few years, including the pandemic, a complex accreditation process, and standards based on schools with a higher average number of students in the program, all of which resulted in the program being assigned a probationary status by CAEP in 2022.

Luckily for Sweet Briar, Dr.

Jeannette Pillsbury '72, who has years of experience in the field, joined the College in fall 2022 to direct the Education program. Dr. Pillsbury led the Education faculty as they worked together with the joint mandate to revitalize the program and earn reaccreditation in a short amount of time. The faculty met weekly to analyze the areas needing improvement. This included ensuring coursework would provide students opportunities to develop the behaviors of good teachers as described by the InTASC Standards, which evaluates those holding teacher licensures.

"Every week, we consider the needs of our students. We work very closely together to determine how we can support individual needs to maintain and retain our students," Dr. Pillsbury said. "In a college like this, we know our students, both as a faculty and individually, and it strengthens the students completing our program."

The Education faculty completed their self-study and submitted the

report to CAEP in fall 2023. In spring 2024, the accreditation visiting team provided feedback and recommended the program be accredited, which was granted this fall. After just two academic years on probation, the Teacher Education Program is once again fully accredited by CAEP. The program will undergo the accreditation process again in the 2028-2029 academic year.

"This is a tremendous outcome. I am delighted that the dedication and hard work of our Education faculty has resulted in the program's full accreditation," said Dr. Jeff Key, dean of the College. "This gives the Education program a national seal of approval and ensures our current and incoming students that it meets the highest standards. Many students want to enter the K-12 teaching profession, and it is critical that Sweet Briar maintain an Education program where its students are prepared to become leaders in the field."



# SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE

## Sweet Briar College

134 Chapel Road  
Sweet Briar, VA 24595



## Register for Reunion 2025!

No matter your class year, we hope to see you at Reunion 2025! We will honor those classes that end in 0 and 5 to recognize their anniversary Reunion years, but all are welcome.

Registration is open at [sbc.edu/reunion](https://sbc.edu/reunion). Early bird pricing is in effect until April 22 at 11:59 p.m. ET. Registration will close May 20 at 11:59 p.m. ET.

Reunion is always a fun time, with plenty of events for you to attend with friends and classmates, learn more

about Sweet Briar and updates to campus, and enjoy our wonderful farm-to-table dining experiences. Here is a sampling of what you can expect for Reunion this year.

- Picnics (weather permitting)
- Special dinners for the 50th and 25th Reunion classes
- Greenhouse and museum tours and wine tastings
- Reunion Convocation
- Alumnae Colleges with the

opportunity to learn from current Sweet Briar professors

- Riding, golf, and hiking outings
- A celebration dinner and dance

Visit [sbc.edu/reunion](https://sbc.edu/reunion) for the full schedule, information about pricing, what to bring, accommodations, frequently asked questions, who's coming, and more. Reach out to us at 434-381-6131 or [alumnae@sbc.edu](mailto:alumnae@sbc.edu) with questions. We hope to see you soon!